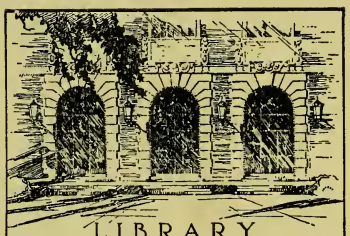
MONICA

by

E. EVERETT-GREEN



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MONICA.

MONICA.

A Novel.

BY

EVELYN EVERETT-GREEN.

Author of

"TORWOOD'S TRUST," "THE LAST OF THE DACRES,"
"RUTHVEN OF RUTHVEN," ETC.

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MONICA.

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CHAPTER THE FIRST.

THE TREVLYNS OF CASTLE TREVLYN.

"Good-bye, Monica. I will look in again to-morrow: but I assure you there is no cause for anxiety. He is not worse than usual, and will be better soon."

The doctor was buttoning up his heavy driving-coat as he spoke, and at the conclusion of the sentence he opened the heavy oak door, letting in a blast of cold air and a sheet of fine, penetrating rain.

"Oh, Raymond, what weather! I ought not to have sent for you."

"Nonsense! You know I am weather-proof. Old Jack will find his way home, if I cannot. Good-bye again."

The door closed upon the stalwart figure, and Lady Monica Trevlyn was left standing alone upon the wide staircase, amid the gathering shadows of the great hall.

Castle Trevlyn was, in truth, a sufficiently grim and desolate place, both within and without. Tangled park, dense pine woods, and a rocky iron-bound coast surrounded it, cutting it off, at it were, from communication with the outside world. Within its walls lay a succession of vast, stately chambers, few of them now inhabited—regions where carved black oak, faded tapestry, rusty armour, and antique relics of bygone days seemed to reign in a sort of mournful grandeur, telling their own

tale of past magnificence and of present poverty and decay.

Yes, the Trevlyns were a fallen race; for the past three generations the reigning earl had been poor, and the present Lord Trevlyn had failed to do anything towards restoring the decaying fortunes of his house. He too was very poor, hence the air of neglect that reigned around and within the castle.

Monica, however, his only child, was far too well used to the gloom and grimness of the old castle to be in the least oppressed by it. She loved her lonely, desolate home with a curious, passionate intensity, and could not picture anything more perfect than the utter silence and isolation that hemmed in her life. The idea of desiring a change

had never so much as occurred to her.

Monica was very beautiful, with a beauty of a rare kind, that haunted the memory of those who saw her, as a strain of music sometimes haunts the ear. Her face was always pale and grave, and at first sight cold even to hardness, yet endued with an underlying depth and sweetness that often eluded observation, though it never failed to make itself felt. It was a lovely face—like that of a pictured saint for purity of outline, of a Greek statue for perfection of feature—almost as calm and colourless as marble itself. Yet, behind the statuesque severity lay that strange, sad, wistful sweetness which could not quite be hidden away, and gave to the beholder the idea that some great trouble had over-

shadowed the girl's life. Let us go with her, and see what that trouble was.

When the door closed upon Raymond Pendrill, she stood for a moment or two silent and motionless, then turned and mounted the shallow stairs once more, and, passing down a long corrider, opened the door of a fire-lit room, and entered softly.

The room had two tenants: one, a great mastiff dog, who acknowledged Monica's entrance by gently flopping his tail against the floor; the other, a lad of seventeen, who lay upon an invalid couch, his face very white and his brows drawn with pain.

As Monica looked at him her face quivered, and a look of unspeakable tenderness swept over it, transfiguring

it for the moment, and showing wonderful possibilities in every line and curve. She bent over him, laying one cool, strong hand upon his hot head.

"Better, Arthur ?"

"Yes, getting better. That stuff Raymond gave me is taking the pain away. Stir up the fire, and sit where I can see you. I like that best."

Arthur Pendrill, cousin to Raymond Pendrill, the young doctor who had just left the castle, was the only child by a first marriage of Lord Trevlyn's second wife. Hoping for an heir, the earl had married again when Monica was seven years old, but his hopes had not been realised, and the second Lady Trevlyn had died only a few years after her union with him.

Arthur, who had been only a mite of two years old when he first came to Castle Trevlyn, knew nothing, of course, of any other home; and he and Monica had grown up like brother and sister, and were tenderly attached, perhaps all the more so from radical differences of character and temperament. Their childhood had been uncloudedly happy; they had enjoyed a glorious liberty in their wild Cornish home that could hardly have been accorded to them anywhere else. Monica's had always been the leading spirit; physically as well as mentally, she had always been the stronger; but he adored her, and emulated her with the zeal and enthusiasm of youth. He followed her wherever she led like a veritable shadow, until that fatal day, five years ago, which had laid

him upon a bed of sickness, and had turned Monica in a few hours' time from a child to a woman.

Upon that day there had been a terrible end to the mad-cap exploits in cliff-climbing in which the girl had always delighted, and Arthur had been carried back to the castle, as all believed, to die.

He did not die, however, but recovered to a suffering, helpless, invalid life; and Monica, who held herself sternly responsible for all, and who had nursed him with a devotion that no mother could have surpassed, now vowed deep down in her heart that her own life should henceforth be devoted to him, that for him she would in future live, and that whatever she could do to lighten his load of pain and make his future happier should be done, at

whatever cost to herself, as the one atonement possible for the rashness which had cost him so dear.

Five years ago that vow had been recorded, and Monica, from a gay, high-spirited girl, had grown into a pale, silent, thoughtful woman; but she had never wearied of her self-imposed charge—never faltered in her resolution. Arthur was her special, sacred charge. Anything that would conduce to his welfare and happiness was to be accomplished at whatever cost. So far, to tend and care for him had been her aim and object of life, and her deep love had made the office sweet. It had never occurred to her that any contingency could possibly arise by which separation from him should prove the truest test of her devotion.

Whilst Arthur and Monica were dreaming their own dreams upstairs, by the light of his dancing fire, no thought of coming changes clouding the horizon of their imagination, downstairs, in the earl's study, a consultation was being held between him and his sister which would have startled Monica not a little had she heard it.

Lord Trevlyn was a tall, stately, grey-headed man of sixty, with a finely-chiselled face and the true Trevlyn cast of countenance that his daughter had inherited. His countenance wore, however, a look of pallor and ill-health that, to a practised eye, denoted weakness of the heart, and his figure had lost its old strength and elasticity, and had grown thin and a little bowed. His expression had much of gentleness mingling with its pride and austerity, as if, with

the advance of years, his nature had softened and sweetened, as indeed had been the case.

Lady Diana, on the other hand, had grown more sharp and dictatorial with advancing age. She was a "modish" old lady, who, although quite innocent of such adornments, always suggested the idea of powder and patches, high-heeled shoes and hoops. She generally carried a fan in her hand, dressed richly and quaintly, and looked something like a human parrot, with her hooked nose, keen black eyes, and quick, sharp voice and movements. She had an independent and sufficient income of her own, and divided her time between her London house and her brother's Cornish castle. She had always expressed it as her intention to

provide for Monica, as her father could do little for his daughter, everything going with the entail in the male line; but there was a sort of instinctive hostility between aunt and niece, of which both were well aware, and Lady Diana was always deeply offended and annoyed by Monica's quiet independence, and her devotion to Arthur.

It was of Monica they were talking this boisterous autumn evening.

"She has a sadly independent spirit," remarked Lady Diana, sighing, and fanning herself slowly, although the big panelled room was by no means warm. "I often think of her future, and wonder what will become of her."

Lord Trevlyn made no immediate response, but by-and-by said slowly:

"I have been thinking of late very seriously of the future."

"Why of late?" was the rather sharp question.

"I have not been feeling so well since my illness in the spring. Raymond Pendrill and his brother have both spoken seriously to me about the necessity for care. I know what that means—they think my state critical. If I am taken, what will become of Monica?"

"I shall, of course, provide for her."

"I know you will do all that is kind and generous; but money is not everything. Monica is peculiar: she wants controlling, yet——"

"Yet no one can control her: I know that well; or only Arthur and his whims. She has no companions but her dogs and

horses. My blood runs cold every time I see her on that wild black thing she rides, with those great dogs bounding round her. There will be another shocking accident one of these days. She ought to be controlled—taken away from her extraordinary life. Yet she will not hear of coming to London with me even on a short visit; she will not even let me speak of it," and Lady Diana's face showed that she was much affronted.

"That is just it," said Lord Trevlyn, slowly; "her life and Arthur's both seem bound up in Trevlyn."

Lady Diana made a significant gesture, which the earl understood.

"Just so; and yet—unless under most exceptional circumstances—unless what I hardly dare to hope should happen—she

must, they must both leave it, at some not very distant date."

The hesitation of Lord Trevlyn's manner did not escape his sister.

"What do you mean?" she asked abruptly.

"I mean that I have been in correspondence lately with my heir, and that I expect him shortly at Trevlyn."

"Your heir?"

"Yes, Randolph Trevlyn, one of the Warwickshire branch. The extinction of the Trevlyns at Drayton last year, you know, made him the next in succession. I made inquiries about him, and then entered into personal communication."

Lady Diana looked keenly interested.

"What have you made out?"

"That he is very well spoken of every-

where as a young man of high character and excellent parts. He is wealthy—very wealthy, I believe, an only son, and enriched by a long minority. He is six or seven and twenty, and he is not married."

Lady Diana's eyes began to sparkle.

"And he is coming here?"

"Yes, next week. Of course I need not tell you what is in my thoughts. I object to match-making, as a rule. I shall put no pressure upon Monica of any kind, but if those two should by chance learn to love one another, I could say my 'Nunc dimittis' at any time."

Lady Diana looked very thoughtful.

"Monica is undoubtedly beautiful," she said, "and she is interesting, which perhaps is better." Her brother, however, made no reply, and as he did not appear in-

clined to discuss the matter farther—they were seldom in entire accord in talking of Monica—she presently rose and quitted the room, saying softly to herself as she did so, "I should love to see that proud girl with a husband's strong hand over her."

That evening, when alone with his daughter, Lord Trevlyn introduced the topic most in his thoughts at that time.

"Monica, do you never want a little variety? What should you say to a visitor at Trevlyn?"

"I would try to make one comfortable. Are you expecting anyone, father?"

"Yes, a kinsman of ours: Mr. Trevlyn, whose acquaintance I wish to make."

"Who is he? I never heard of him before."

"No; I have not known much about

him myself till lately, when circumstances made him my heir. Monica, have you ever thought what will happen at Trevlyn in the event of my death?"

A very troubled look crept into Monica's dark, unfathomable eyes. Her face looked pained and strained.

"I think you ought to know, Monica," said the earl, gently. "Perhaps you have thought that the estates would pass to you in due course of time."

Monica pressed her hands closely together, but her voice was steady, her words were quietly spoken.

"I do not know if I have ever thought about it; but I suppose I have fancied you would leave all to Arthur or to me."

"Exactly, you would naturally inherit all I have to leave; but Trevlyn is entailed

in the male line, and goes with the title. At my death Mr. Randolph Trevlyn will be the next earl, and all will be his."

Monica sat very still, feeling as if she had received some sudden stunning blow ; but she could not take in all in a moment the gist of such intelligence. A woman in some matters, she was a child in others.

" But, father," she said quietly, and without apparent emotion, " Arthur is surely much nearer to you than this Mr. Trevlyn, whom you have never seen ? "

The earl smiled half-sadly, and shook his head.

" My dear, you do not understand these things ; I feel towards Arthur as if he were my son, but he is not of my kindred. He is my wife's son, not mine ; he is not a Trevlyn at all."

Monica's troubled gaze rested on her father's face.

"He cannot live anywhere but at Trevlyn," she said, slowly. "It would kill him to take him anywhere else;" and in her heart she added — a little jealous hostility rising up in her heart against the stranger and usurper who was coming— "He *ought* to have it. He is a son and a brother here. By every law of right Trevlyn should be his."

Foolish, irrational Monica! Where Arthur was concerned her eyes were blinded, her reason was warped by her love. And the ways of the great outside world were so difficult to understand.

Presently she spoke in very low, measured tones, though not without a ittle falter in her voice now and then.

"You mean that if—if you were to die —Arthur and I should be turned out of Trevlyn."

"You would neither of you have any right to remain," answered Lord Trevlyn, choosing his words with care. "You would find a home with your aunt; and as for Arthur, I suppose he would go to his cousins—unless, indeed, if he seemed unable to live away from the place, some arrangement with my successor could be made. Everything would depend on him, but of course it would be a difficult arrangement."

She drew a long breath, and passed her hand across her eyes.

"Mr. Trevlyn is coming here, you say?"

"Yes, next week. I think it is right

that we should become acquainted with our kinsman, especially as so much may depend upon him in the future."

"I think so too," answered Monica; and then she quietly left him, without uttering another word.

CHAPTER THE SECOND.

MONICA'S RIDE.

THE next morning dawned fair and clear, as is often the case after a storm. Monica rose early, her first thought, as usual, for Arthur. She crept on tip-toe to his room, to find him as she had left him, sleeping calmly—as he was likely now to do for hours, after the attack of the previous day; and finding herself no longer required by him, the girl was not long in making up her mind how these early hours of glimmering daylight were to be spent.

Seven o'clock found her in the saddle, mounted on her glossy black thorough-bred, who, gentle under her hand, would brook

no other rider, and showed his mettle in every graceful eager movement, and in the restless quivering of his shapely limbs. His coat shone like satin in the pale early sunlight; he pranced and curvetted as he felt his rider upon his back. Monica and her horse together made a picture that for beauty and grace could hardly meet its match in the length and breadth of the land.

The girl was perfectly at home in the saddle. She heeded no whit the pawing of her steed, or the delighted baying of the great hounds who formed her escort, and whose noise caused Guy's delicate nerves many a restive start. She gathered up her reins with practised hand, soothed him by a gentle caress, and rode quietly and absently out of the great grass-grown

court-yard and through a stretch of tangled park beyond. Once outside the gates, she turned to the right, and quickly gained a narrow grass-grown track, which led for miles along the edge of the great frowning cliffs that almost overhung at a giddy height the tossing ocean far below. It was a perilous-looking path enough—one false step would be enough to hurl both horse and rider to certain destruction, but Monica rode fearlessly onward; she and her horse were familiar with every step of the way, both knew the wild cliff path, and both loved it; and Guy stretched his delicate supple limbs in one of those silent gallops over the elastic turf in which his heart delighted.

Monica seldom passed more than a day without traversing that well-known track.

She loved to feel the fresh salt wind as it blew off the sea and met her face. Sometimes it was warm and tender as a caress, sometimes fierce and boisterous, a wet, blinding blast, laden with spray from the tempest-tossed waves below; but to-day it was a keen, fresh wind, salt, and strong, and life-giving—a wind that brought the warm colour to her cheek, the light to her eye and gave a peculiar and indescribable radiance to her usually cold and statuesque beauty.

To-day she felt strangely restless and uneasy. A sort of haunting fear was upon her, a presentiment of coming trouble, that was perhaps all the harder to bear from its very vagueness. She had never before realised that the future would bring any change to the course of her life, save

that of gradually increasing age. Not for an instant had it ever occurred to her that a possibility such as that hinted at last night by her father could by any chance arise. That she and Arthur might ever have to leave Trevlyn seemed the wildest of all wild dreams, and yet that is what in all probability must happen in the event of her father's death. Monica shuddered at the bare idea. Her beautiful dark eyes glowed strangely. It must not, it should not be. It would be too cruel, too hard, too unjust!

In deep abstraction, Monica rode along the cliff for some three miles, then turning her horse's head inland, she crossed an open space of wind-swept down, leaped a low stone wall, and found herself in a road, which she followed for some considerable

distance. It led at length to the quaint little town of St. Maws, a pretty little place, nestling down in a wooded hollow, and intersected by a narrow inlet from the sea, which was spanned by a many-arched bridge. All the trees in the neighbourhood seemed to have collected round St. Maws, and its inhabitants were justly proud of their stately oaks and graceful beeches.

Monica rode quietly through the empty streets, returning now and again a salutation from some tradesman or rustic. It was still early — only eight o'clock — and the sleepy little place was slowly awaking from its night's repose. At the far end of the town stood a good-sized house, well hidden from view behind a high brick wall. Guy turned in at the gate of his own accord, and, following a short, winding

carriage drive, halted before the front door. The house was of warm red brick, mellowed by age; there was an indescribable air of comfort and hospitality hanging over it. It was mantled by glossy ivy, and its gables, steep pitched roof, and twisted chimneys were charmingly picturesque. The door stood wide open as if to invite entrance. Monica's hounds had already announced her approach, and a tall, wiry-looking man of some thirty summers was standing upon the threshold. He was not much like his brother, the blue-eyed, brown-bearded Raymond, having a thin, sharp, closely-shaved face, very keen penetrating eyes, and a cynical mouth. Tom Pendrill was himself a doctor, like his brother; but he did not practise on his own account, being a man of scientific predilections, with

a taste for authorship. His college fellowship rendered him independent of lucrative employment, and, save for assisting his brother with critical cases, his time was spent in study and research.

"Well, Monica, you are abroad early to-day," was his greeting. Arthur's cousins had been like cousins to Monica almost ever since she could remember. "You have come to breakfast, of course?"

"I came to tell Raymond not to trouble to call at Trevlyn to-day, if he is busy. Arthur is much better. I want to see Aunt Elizabeth; but I should like some breakfast very much."

"I will take your horse," said Tom, as the girl slipped from the saddle. "You will find Aunt Elizabeth in the breakfast-room."

The "Aunt Elizabeth" thus alluded to was the widow of the Pendrills' uncle, and she had lived with them for many years, keeping their house, and bringing into it that element of womanly refinement and comfort which can never be found in a purely bachelor establishment. The young men were both warmly attached to her, as was her other nephew, Arthur, at the Castle. As for Monica, "Aunt Elizabeth" had been to her almost like a mother, supplying that great want in the girl's life of which she was only vaguely conscious—the want of tender womanly comprehension and sympathy in the trials and troubles of childhood and youth.

It had been her habit for many years to bring all her troubles to Mrs. Pendrill.

She did not discuss them with Arthur. Her mission was to soothe and cheer him, not to infect him with any fears or sorrows. He was her boy, her charge, her dearly-loved brother, but Aunt Elizabeth was her confidant and friend.

She was a very sweet-looking old lady, with snow-white hair, and a gentle, placid, earnest face. She greeted Monica with a peculiarly tender smile, and asked after Arthur with the air of one who loved him.

"He is better," said Monica, "much better, or I could not have come. He is asleep; he will most likely sleep till noon. I want to talk to you, Aunt Elizabeth. I felt I must come to you. When breakfast is over, please let us go somewhere together. There is so much I want to say."

When they found themselves at length secure from interruption in Mrs. Pendrill's pretty little parlour, Monica stood very quiet for a minute or two, and then turning abruptly to her aunt, she asked:

"Is my father very much out of health?"

Mrs. Pendrill was a little startled.

"What makes you ask that, my love?"

"I can hardly say—I think it is the way he looked, the way he spoke. Please tell me the truth, dear Aunt Elizabeth. I have nobody but you to turn to," and there was a pathetic quiver in the voice as well as in the pale, sweet face.

Mrs. Pendrill did not try to deceive her. She knew from both her nephews that Lord Trevlyn's health was in a very precarious state, and she loved Monica too well not to

wish to see her somewhat prepared for a change that must inevitably fall upon her sooner or later. She had always shrunk from thinking of this trouble, she shrank from bringing it home to Monica now; but a plain question had been asked, and her answer must not be too ambiguous.

Monica listened very quietly, as was her wont, not betraying any emotion save in the strained look of pain in her great dark eyes. Then very quietly, too, she told Mrs. Pendrill what her father had said the previous evening about his heir, and about the prospective visit.

"Aunt Elizabeth," said Monica suddenly after a long pause, betraying for the first time the emotion she felt, "Aunt Elizabeth, I do not wish to be wicked or ungenerous, but I *hate* that man! He has no right to

be at Trevlyn, yet he will some day come and turn out Arthur and me. I cannot help hating him for it; but oh, if only he would be good to Arthur, if only he would let him stay, I could bear anything else I think. *Do* you think he would be generous, and would let him keep his own little corner of the Castle? It does not seem much to ask, yet father thought it might be difficult. Arthur is so patient, so good, he might learn to love him—he might even adopt him, so to speak. Am I very foolish to hope such things, Aunt Elizabeth?—they do not seem impossible to me."

Mrs. Pendrill mused a little while.

"Has this Mr. Trevlyn any family?"

"I do not know. Father did not speak of a wife. I fancy he is an old bachelor."

"He is old, then?"

"I fancy he is elderly, or at any rate middle-aged, or father would hardly care to have him on a visit. He must be younger than father, of course, but I do not know anything more about him. Oh, it will be very hard; but if he will only be good to Arthur, I will try to bear the rest."

"I am sure you will, my Monica," said Mrs. Pendrill tenderly. "I am sure you will never be ungenerous or act unworthily. A dark cloud seems hanging over your life, but there is light behind, though we cannot always see it. And, remember, my darling, that gold shines all the brighter for having been tried in the furnace."

"I know the fellow," said Tom Pendrill, an hour later, when Monica had gone, an

he had heard from his aunt part of what had passed between them. "Monica is out about his age; he can't be more than six or seven and twenty, and a right good fellow he is too, and would make my lady a capital husband, if he is not married already. Randolph Trevlyn was at Oxford; I knew him there pretty well, though he was only an undergraduate when I had taken my degree. The name sounded home-like, and I made friends with him. He wasn't anywhere near the title then, but I suppose there have been deaths in the family since. Well, well, the earl is quite right to have him down, and if he could manage to fall in love with Monica and marry her, it would simplify matters wonderfully; but that wild bird will need a good deal of training before she will

come at a husband's call, and there is such a thing as spreading the snare too much in the sight of the quarry."

No thought of this kind, however, entered into Monica's head. She was far too unversed in the ways of the world to entertain the smallest suspicion of the hopes entertained on her account. She thought a good deal of the coming guest as the days went by—thought of him with bitterness, with aversion, with mistrust, but in the light of a possible husband—never for a single instant.

It was the day before the stranger was expected, and Monica, as the sun was sinking in the sky, was riding alone in the pine wood that surrounded the Castle. She was grave and pre-occupied, as she had been for the week past, haunted

by the presage of coming sorrow and change. Her face was pale and sad, yet there was a wonderful depth of sweetness in its expression of wistful melancholy. The setting sun, slanting through the ruddy trunks of the tall pines, shone full upon her, lighting her golden hair, and making an aureole of glory round her head, showing off with peculiar clear distinctness the graceful outline of her supple figure and the beauty of the horse she rode.

She was in a very thoughtful mood, so absent and pre-occupied as to be quite lost to outside impressions, when Guy suddenly swerved and reared, with a violence that would have unseated a less practised rider. Monica was not in the least alarmed, but the movement aroused her from her reverie, and she was quickly made

aware of what had frightened the horse.

A tall, broad-shouldered young man stepped forward, and laid a hand upon Guy's bridle, lifting his hat at the same time, and disclosing a broad brow, with a sweeping wave of dark hair lying across it.

"I beg a thousand pardons; I believe I frightened your horse. He is evidently unused to the sight of trespassers. I trust you have not been alarmed."

Monica smiled at the notion; her face had been somewhat set and cold till the apology had been made. The stranger had no right to be there, certainly, but his frank admission of the fact went far to palliate the crime. She allowed herself to smile, and the smile was in itself a revelation.

"It does not matter," she said quietly. "I know the wood is perplexing; but if you keep bearing to the west you will find the road before long. No, I was not frightened, thank you. Good afternoon."

She bent her head slightly, and the stranger uncovered again. He was smiling now, and she could not deny that he was very good-looking, and every inch the gentleman.

She had not an idea who he was nor what he could be doing there; but it was no business of hers. He was probably some tourist who had lost his way exploring the beauties of the coast. She was just a little puzzled by the look his face had worn as he turned away: there was a sort of subdued amusement in

the dark blue eyes, and his long brown moustache had quivered as if with the effort to subdue a smile. Yet there had been nothing in the least impertinent in his manner; on the contrary, he had been particularly courtly and polished in his bearing. Monica dismissed the subject from her mind, and rode home as the sun dipped beneath the far horizon.

CHAPTER THE THIRD.

LORD TREVLYN'S HEIR

Lord Trevlyn sat in his study in the slowly waning daylight, waiting the arrival of his expected guest. Now that the moment had come, he shrank from the meeting a good deal more than he had once believed he should do. It was so long since he had seen a strange face, and his relations with this unknown heir would perhaps be difficult: undoubtedly the situation was somewhat strained. Would the young man think a trap was being set for him in the person of the beautiful Monica? Was he acting a wise or fatherly part in schem-

ing to give her to this stranger, if it should be possible to do so ?

He had liked the tone of Randolph Trevlyn's courteously-worded acceptance of his invitation. He had liked all that he heard of the man himself. He had a sort of presentiment that his wish would in time be realised, that this visit would not be fruitless; but his child's happiness: would that be secured in securing to her the possession of a well-loved home?

Randolph Trevlyn would hardly be likely to spend any great part of his life at this lonely sea-bound castle. He might pass a few months there, perhaps; but where would the bulk of his time be spent?

Lord Trevlyn tried to picture his beau-

tiful, wayward, freedom-loving daughter mixing in the giddy whirl of London life, learning its ways and following its fashions, and he utterly failed to do so. She seemed indissolubly connected with the wild sea-coast, with the gloomy pine-woods, with the rugged independence of her sea-girt home. Monica a fashionable young countess, leading a gay life of social distraction ! The thing seemed impossible.

But he had no time to indulge his imaginings farther. The door opened, and his guest was ushered in. The old earl rose and bade him welcome with his customary simple, stately courtesy. It was growing somewhat dark in that oak-panelled room, and for a minute or two he hardly distinguished the features of the stranger, but the voice and the words

in which the young man answered his greeting pleased his fastidious taste, and a haunting dread of which he had scarcely been fully aware faded from his mind at once and for ever in the first moment of introduction.

Lord Trevlyn heaved an unconscious sigh of relief when he resumed his seat, and was able to give a closer scrutiny to his guest. One glance at his face, figure, and dress, together with the pleasant sound of his voice, convinced Lord Trevlyn that this young man was a gentleman in the rather restricted sense in which he employed that elastic term.

He was a handsome, broad-shouldered, powerful man, with a fine figure, dark hair and moustache, dark blue eyes, frank and well-opened, a quiet, commanding air

and carriage, and that cast of countenance which plainly showed that the blood of the Trevlyns ran in his veins.

Lord Trevlyn eyed him with quiet satisfaction, and from the conversation that ensued he had no reason to rescind his favourable impression. Randolph Trevlyn was evidently a man of culture and refinement, with a mental capacity distinctly above the average. He was, morever, emphatically a man of the world in its truest and widest sense—a man who has lived in the world, and studied it closely, learning thereby from its silent teaching the good and the evil thereof.

The two men talked for a time of the family to which they belonged, and the deaths that had lately taken place, bringing this young man so near to the title.

"The Trevlyns seem to be a dying race," said the old earl, half sadly. "Our family is slowly dying out. I suppose it has done its work in the world, and is not needed any longer in these stirring times. You and my daughter are now the sole representatives of the Trevlyns in your generation, as my sister and I are in ours."

Randolph Trevlyn looked into his kinsman's face with a great deal of reverence and admiration. He liked to meet a man who was a genuine specimen of the "old school." He felt a natural reverence for the head of his house, and his liking showed itself in voice and manner. Lord Trevlyn saw this, and was gratified, whilst the younger man was pleased to feel himself in accord with his host. The interview ended with mutual satisfaction on both

sides, and Randolph was taken up the great oak staircase, down one or two dim, ghostly corridors, and landed finally in a couple of large panelled rooms, most antiquely and quaintly furnished, in both of which, however, great fires of pine logs were blazing cheerily.

"We dine at eight," Lord Trevlyn had said, in parting with his guest. "I shall hope then to have the pleasure of introducing you to my sister and my daughter."

Left alone in his comfortable but rather grim-looking quarters, Randolph broke into a low laugh.

"And so this sombre old place, full of ghosts and phantoms of departed days—this enchanted castle between sea and forest—is the home of the lovely girl I saw

yesterday! Incongruous, and yet so entirely appropriate! She wants a setting of her own, different from anything else. It must have been Lady Monica I encountered, the lady of the pine-wood. What a sad, proud, lovely face it was, with its frame of golden hair, and soft eyes like a deer's; and her voice was as sweet as her face, low, and rich, and full of music. What has been the secret of her life? Some sorrow, I am certain, has overshadowed it. Who will be the happy man to bring the sunshine back to that lovely troubled face? Randolph Trevlyn, do not run on so fast. You are no longer a boy. You must not judge by first impressions; you will know more of her soon."

Randolph's encounter with Monica the previous day had been purely accidental.

The young man had reached St. Maws one day earlier than he had expected, one day earlier than he had been invited to arrive at the Castle. Some business in Plymouth which he had expected would detain him some days had been despatched with greater speed than he had anticipated, and he had gone on to St. Maws to renew acquaintance with his old friend Pendrill, who lived, as he remembered, in that place.

When he descended to the drawing room it was to find the earl and Lady Diana there before him, and he made as favourable an impression upon the vivacious old lady as he had done before upon her brother. Yet he found his attention straying sometimes from the animated talk of his companion, and his eyes would wander to the door by which Monica must enter.

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She came at last, stately, beautiful, statuesque, her dress an antique cream-coloured brocade, that had, without doubt, belonged to some remote ancestress; her golden hair coiled like a crown upon her graceful head. She had that same indescribable air of isolation and remoteness that had struck him so much when he had seen her riding in the wood. She did not lift her eyes when her father presented the stranger to her, but only bent her head very slightly, and sat down by herself, somewhat apart.

But when dinner was announced, and Randolph gave her his arm to lead her in, she raised her eyes, and their glances met. He saw that she recognised him, and yet she gave not the slightest sign of having done so, and her face settled into lines of even more severe gravity than before. He

felt that she was annoyed at his having met and addressed her previously, and that she would brook no allusion to the encounter.

His talk with the Pendrills had prepared him somewhat for Monica's coldness towards himself. It was natural enough, he thought, and perhaps a little interesting, especially as he meant to set himself to win her good-will at last.

He did not make much way during dinner. Monica was very silent, and Lady Diana engrossed almost all his attention; but he was content to bide his time, conscious of the charm of her presence, and of the haunting, pathetic character of her beauty, and deeply touched by the story of her devotion to the crippled, suffering Arthur, which was told him by the earl when they were alone together,

with more of detail than he had heard it before.

When he returned to the drawing-room, he went straight up to Monica, and said:

"I am going to ask a favour of you, Lady Monica. I want to know if you will be good enough to introduce me to your brother?"

Her face softened slightly as she raised her eyes to his. It was a happy instinct that had led Randolph to call Arthur by the name she most loved to hear, "your brother."

"You would like to see him to-night?"

"If it is not too late to intrude upon an invalid, I should very much."

"I think he would be pleased," said Monica. "It is so seldom he has any one to talk to."

The visit to Arthur was a great success. The lad took to Randolph at once, delighted to find him so young, so pleasant, and so companionable. Of course he identified him at once as the hero of Monica's adventure yesterday, and was amused to hear his account of the meeting. Monica did not stay long in the room; but her absence enabled Arthur to sing her praises as he loved to do, and Randolph listened with a satisfaction that surprised himself. He was very kind to the boy, sincerely sorry for his helpless state, and more than ready to stand his friend if ever there should be occasion. Before he left the invalid that night, he felt that in him, at least, he had secured a staunch and trusty friend.

But during the days that followed he

could not hide from himself the fact that Monica avoided him. Indeed, he sometimes hardly saw her from morning till night, and when they did meet at the luncheon or dinner-table, she sat still and silent, scarcely vouchsafing him a word or a look.

The first time Randolph found himself alone with Monica was in this wise: he had been riding about the immediate precincts of the Castle with the earl one morning, and his host was just expressing a wish to extend their ride farther, in order to see some of the best views of the neighbourhood—hesitating somewhat on his own account, as he had been forbidden to exert himself by much exercise—when Monica suddenly appeared, mounted on Guy, and attended by her convoy of dogs, ready for her daily gallop.

Lord Trevlyn's face softened at her approach; he loved his fair daughter with a deep and tender love.

"Monica, my dear, you have come in good time. I want Mr. Trevlyn to see the view of the Castle from the Black Cliff, and the wonderful archway in the rocks farther along the coast. These fine days must not be wasted; and I feel too tired to undertake the ride myself. Will you act as my substitute, and do the honours of Trevlyn?"

Monica glanced with a sort of mute wistfulness into her father's pale face, and assented quietly. The next moment she and Randolph were riding side by side over the close soft turf of the sweeping downs.

The girl's face was set and grave, she

seemed lost in thought, and was only roused by the eccentricities of Guy's behaviour. The spirited little barb resented company even more than his mistress did, and showed his distaste by every means in his power. He was so troublesome that Randolph was half afraid for Monica's safety, but she smiled at the idea of danger.

"I know Guy too well," she answered; "it is nothing. He only hates company. He is not used to it."

"Had you not better have another horse to-day?"

"Let myself be conquered? No, thank you. I always say that if that once were to happen, it would never be safe ever for me to ride Guy again."

The battle with the horse brought the

colour to her face and the light to her eyes. She looked more approachable now as she cantered along beside him (victorious at last, with her dogs bounding about her) than she had ever done before. He drew her out a little about her four-footed favourites, and being a lover of animals himself, and knowing their ways, they found a good deal to say without trenching in any way upon dangerous or personal topics.

They visited the places indicated by Lord Trevlyn, and Randolph admired the beauties of the wild coast with a genuine appreciation that satisfied Monica. Had her companion been anybody but himself —an alien usurper come to spy out the land that would some time be his own— had his praises been less sounded in her

ears by Lady Diana, whose praise was in Monica's eyes worse than any open condemnation—she could almost have found it in her heart to like him; but as it was, jealous distrust drove all kindlier feelings away, and even his handsome person and pleasant address added to her sense of hostility and disfavour.

Why was he to win all hearts—he who would so ruthlessly act the part of tyrant and foe, as soon as his chance came? Did not even his friend, Lady Diana, continually repeat that his succession to the Trevlyn estate must inevitably mean an immediate break-up of all existing forms and usages? Was it not an understood thing that he would exercise his power without considering anything but his strict legal right? Lady Diana knew the world—that

world to which Randolph evidently belonged. If this was her opinion, was it not presumably the right one? She sneered openly at the suggestion her niece had once thrown out of the possibility of his granting to Arthur liberty to remain at Trevlyn.

"You foolish child!" she said sharply. "What is Arthur to him? Men do not make sentimental attachments to each other. Arthur has no right here, and Mr. Trevlyn will show him so very plainly when the time comes."

Was it any wonder that Monica's heart rose in revolt against this handsome, powerful stranger, who seemed in a manner to hold her whole future in his strong hands? Was it strange she avoided him? Was it difficult to understand that she distrusted him, and that only his

present kindness to Arthur and the lad's affection for him enabled her to tolerate with any kind of submission his presence in the house?

He tried now to make her talk of herself, of Arthur, of her home and her life there, but she became at once impenetrably silent. Her face assumed its old look of statuesque *hauteur*. The ride back to the Castle was a very silent one. Randolph had enjoyed the hour he had spent in the company of Lady Monica, but he could not flatter himself that much ground had been gained.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH.

CONRAD FITZGERALD.

Whether Monica would ever have thawed towards him of her own free will Randolph Trevlyn could not tell; but during a sharp attack of illness that prostrated Arthur at this juncture, he was so much in the sick boy's room, and so kind and patient and helpful there, that the girl's coldness began insensibly to melt; and before the attack had passed, he felt that if she did not share her brother's liking for him, at least the old antipathy, hostility, had somewhat abated.

They rode out together sometimes now, exploring the country round the Castle, or galloping over the wind-swept moors.

Monica was generally silent, always reserved and unapproachable, and yet he felt that a certain vantage-ground had been gained, and he did not intend to allow it to slip away. Unconsciously almost to himself, the wish had grown to win the heart of this wild, beautiful, lonely young creature. Yet the charm of her solitary tamelessness was so great that he hardly wished the spell to be too suddenly broken. He could not picture Monica other than she was—and yet he was growing to love her with every fibre of his being.

But fortune was not kind to Randolph, as an incident that quickly followed showed him.

He and Monica had ridden one day across a wild sweep of trackless moorland, when they came in sight of a picturesque

Elizabethan house, in a decidedly dilapidated condition, whose red brick walls and mullioned windows took Randolph's fancy. He asked who lived there.

"No one now," answered Monica, with a touch as of regret in her voice; "no one has lived there for years and years. Once it was such a bright, happy home—we used to play there so often, Arthur and I, when we were children; but the master died, the children were taken away, and the house was shut up. That was ten years ago. I have never been there since."

"Who is the owner? Does he never reside here now?"

"He has never been back I believe he is not rich, and could not keep up the place. He must be about five-and-twenty by this time. He is Sir Conrad Fitzgerald

—he was such a nice boy when I used to play with him."

Randolph started suddenly; he controlled himself in a moment, but Monica's eyes were very quick, and she had seen the instinctive recoil at the sound of the name.

"Do you know Conrad Fitzgerald?" she asked.

"We have met," he answered, somewhat grimly. "I do not claim the honour of his acquaintance."

Monica glanced at him. She saw something in the stern lines of Randolph's face that told a tale of its own. She was not afraid to state the conclusion she reached by looking at him.

"That means that you have quarrelled," she said.

"I am not at liberty to explain what it means," was the answer, spoken with a certain stern gravity, not lost upon Monica. She had never seen her companion look like this before. The strength and resolution of his face compelled a sort of involuntary respect, yet she revolted against hearing the friend and playmate of her childhood tacitly condemned by this stranger.

"I do not like innuendoes, Mr. Trevlyn," she said. "If you have anything to say against a man I think it is better spoken out."

"I have nothing at all to say upon the subject of Sir Conrad Fitzgerald," he answered, quietly.

"Ungenerous! unmanly!" was Monica's mental comment. "I cannot bear hearing

a character *hinted* away. I loved Conrad once, and he loved me. I do not believe he has done anything for which he should be condemned."

Randolph thought little of the few chance words respecting Sir Conrad Fitzgerald at the time when they were spoken; but he was destined to think a good deal about that individual before many days had passed.

Finding his way to Arthur's room towards dusk one day, as he often did, he was surprised to find quite a little group around the glowing fire. Monica and the dogs were objects sufficiently familiar to him by this time, but who was that graceful, fair-haired youth who sat beside the girl, his face turned towards her and away from Randolph, whilst he made

some gay, laughing rejoinder to her in a very sweet, musical voice?

Randolph recognised that laugh and that voice with another start of dismay. His face set itself in very stern lines, and he would have withdrawn in silence had he been able to do so unobserved; but Arthur saw him as he moved to go, and cried gladly:

"Oh, here is Randolph — that is right. Our old friend and our new one must be introduced. Sir Conrad Fitzgerald — Mr. Randolph Trevlyn."

Randolph's eyes were fixed full upon the face of the younger man as he made the slightest possible inclination of the head. His hand had unconsciously clenched itself in a gesture that was a little significant. Monica's eyes were fixed upon Conrad.

Was it possible that he quailed and flinched a little beneath the steady gaze bent upon him? She did not think so, she was sure it could not be; no, he was only drawing himself up to return that cold salutation with one expressive of sovereign contempt.

Not a word was exchanged between the two men. Randolph sat down beside Arthur, and began to talk to him. Conrad drew nearer to Monica, and entered into a low-toned conversation with her. His voice sounded tender and caressing, and ever and anon such words as these reached young Trevlyn's ears:

"Do you remember, Monica?"—"Ah, those sweet days of childhood!"—"You have not forgotten?"—"How often have I thought of it all."

Evidently they were discussing the happy

past—the bright days that had been shared by them before the cloud had fallen upon Monica's life. Randolph could not keep his eyes away from her face. It was lit up with a new expression, half sad, and yet strangely—infinitely sweet. Conrad's face was very beautiful too, with its delicate, almost effeminate colouring and serious, melancholy blue eyes. He had been a lovely child, and his beauty had not faded with time. It had stood him in good stead in many crises of his life, and was doing so still. There is an irrational association in most minds between beauty and goodness.

But Randolph's face grew more and more dark as he watched the pair opposite. Old memories were stirring within him, and at last he rose and quitted the room, feeling that he could no longer stand the

presence of that man within it, could no longer endure to see him bending over Monica, and talking to her in that soft, caressing way.

Conrad looked after him, a vindictive light in his soft blue eyes. As the door closed he uttered a low laugh.

"What is it?" asked Arthur.

"Oh, nothing. I was only wondering how long he would be able to brazen it out?"

"Brazen what out?"

"Why, sitting there with my eye upon him. Couldn't you see how restless he got?"

"Restless!" repeated Arthur, quickly. "Why should he be restless?"

Conrad laughed again.

"Never mind, my boy. I bear him

no malice. The least said the soonest mended."

Monica was silent and a little troubled. She liked to understand things plainly. It seemed to her an unnatural thing for two men to be at almost open feud, yet unwilling to say a word as to the cause of their mutual antagonism. She thought that if they met beneath her father's roof they should be willing to do so as friends.

Her gravity did not escape Conrad's notice.

"Has he been maligning me already?" he asked, suddenly, with a subdued flash in his eyes.

"No," answered Monica, with a sort of involuntary coldness. "He has not said a word. I do not think," she added

presently, with a gentle dignity of manner, "that I should listen very readily from the lips of a stranger to stories detrimental to an old companion and playmate, told behind his back."

Conrad gave her a look of humble gratitude. He would have taken her hand and kissed it had she been anybody else, but somehow, demonstrations of such a kind always seemed impossible where Monica was concerned. Even to him she was decidedly unapproachable.

"It is good indeed of you to say so," he said; "but, Monica—I may call you Monica still, may I not? as I have always thought of you all these long years—you might hear stories to my detriment that would not be untrue. There have been faults and follies and sins in my past life

that I would gladly blot out if I could. I have been wild and reckless often. I lost my parents very young, as you know, and it is hard for a boy without home and home influences to grow up as he should do." Conrad paused, and then added, with a good deal of feeling: "Monica, can a man do more than repent the past? Can nothing ever wipe away the stain, and give him back his innocence again? Must he always bear about the shadow of sorrow and shame?"

Monica's face was grave and thoughtful. She shook her head as she replied:

"It is no use coming to me with hard questions, Conrad; I know so little, so very little of the world you live in. Yet it seems to me that it would be hard indeed

if repentance did not bring forgiveness in its wake."

"'Who with repentance is not satisfied,
Is not of heaven nor of earth.'"

quoted Arthur, lazily. "What is it you have done? Can't you tell us all the story, and let us judge for ourselves—old friends and playmates as we are?"

"I should like to," answered Conrad, gently. "Some day I will; but do not let us spoil this first meeting with bitter memories. Let it be enough for me to have come home, and have found my friends unchanged towards me. May I venture still to call you my friends?"

"To be sure," cried Arthur, readily; but Conrad's eyes were fixed on Monica's face; and she saw it, and looked back

at him with her steady, inscrutable gaze.

"I do not think I change easily," she said, with her gentle dignity of manner. "You were my friend and playmate in our happy childhood. I should like to think of you always as a friend."

"Of course," put in Arthur, gaily; "of course we are all friends, and you must make friends with Randolph, too. He is such a good fellow."

"I have no objection at all," answered Conrad, with a short laugh. "The difficulty, I imagine, will be on his side. Some men never forget or forgive any one who succeeds in finding them out."

"Oh, we will manage Randolph, never fear. You are ready, then, to make it up if he is?"

"Most certainly," was the ready answer.

"He is the nobler man of the two," said Monica to herself—at least her reason and judgment said so; her instinct, oddly enough, spoke in exactly opposite words; but surely it was right to listen first to the voice of reason.

"I say, Randolph," said Arthur, half an hour later, when the young baronet had taken his departure and the other guest had returned to the invalid's room. "Conrad is quite willing to make it up with you."

Randolph's smile was a little peculiar.

"Sir Conrad Fitzgerald is very kind."

"Well, you know, it's always best to make friends, isn't it? Deadly feuds are a nuisance in these days, don't you think so?"

Randolph smiled again ; but his manner was certainly a little baffling.

"Come now, Randolph," persisted Arthur, with boyish insistence, "you won't hang back now that he is ready for the reconciliation. He is the injured party, is he not?"

There was rather a strange light in Randolph's dark blue eyes. His manner was exceedingly quiet, yet he looked as if he could be a little dangerous.

"Possibly," was the rather inconclusive answer.

"You know he has come to stay some little time in the neighbourhood, and he will often be here. It will be so awkward if you are at daggers drawn all the time."

"My dear boy, you need not put your-

self about. I will take care that there shall be no annoyance to anybody."

"You will make friends, then?"

"I will meet Sir Conrad Fitzgerald, whenever he is your father's guest, with the courtesy due from one man to another, when circumstances bring them together beneath the roof of the same hospitable host. But to take his hand in reconciliation or friendship is a thing that I cannot and will not do. Do you understand now?"

Arthur looked at him intently, as for once Monica was doing also.

"Randolph," he said, a little inconsequently, "do you know I think I could almost be afraid of you sometimes. I never saw you look before as you looked just then."

The stern lines on Randolph's face relaxed a little but he still looked grave and pre-occupied, sitting with his elbow on his knee, leaning forward, and pulling his moustache with an abstracted air.

"You are rather unforgiving too, I think," pursued the boy. "Conrad admitted he had done wrong, but he is very sorry for the past; and I think it is hard when old offences, repented of, are not consigned to oblivion."

Randolph was silent.

"Don't you agree?"

Still only inpenetrable silence.

"Come, Randolph, don't be so mysterious and so revengeful. Let us have the whole story, and judge for ourselves."

"Excuse me, Arthur; but the life of Sir Conrad Fitzgerald is not one that I choose

to discuss. His affairs are no concern of mine, nor, if you will pardon my saying so, any concern of yours, either. You are at liberty to renew past friendship with him if it pleases you to do so; but it is useless to ask me to do the same."

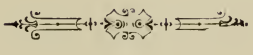
And with that Randolph rose, and quitted the room without another word.

"There is something odd about it all," said Arthur, who was inclined to indulge a good deal of curiosity about other people's affairs: "but I think Conrad behaves the better of the two."

Monica quietly assented; but perhaps she might have changed her opinion had she heard the muttered threats breathed by Conrad as he rode across the darkening moor:

"So, Randolph Trevlyn, our paths have

crossed once more ! I have vowed vengeance upon you to your very face, and perhaps my day has come at last. I see through you. I see the game you are playing. I will baulk you, if I can; but in any case I will have my revenge



CHAPTER THE FIFTH.

SUNDAY AT TREVLYN.

It was Sunday, and Monica, with Randolph beside her, was making her way by the path along the cliff towards the little old church perched high upon the crags, between Trevlyn and St. Maws, but nearer to the town than the Castle. Randolph had found out the ways of the house by this time. He knew now that Monica played the organ in the little church, that she started early and walked across the downs, instead of going in the carriage with her father and aunt. He knew that she generally lunched with the Pendrills between services,

and that one of her cousins walked back with her to the Castle, and spent an hour with Arthur afterwards.

He had found out all this during his first two Sundays, and upon the third he had ventured to ask permission to be her escort.

Randolph was quite aware that he had lost ground with Monica of late; that the barrier, partially broken down during the week of anxiety about Arthur, had risen up again as impenetrably as ever. How far Sir Conrad Fitzgerald's appearance upon the scene was to blame for this he could not tell, nor could Monica herself have explained; but there was no mistaking the added coldness on her part, and the sense of restraint experienced in his presence.

And yet he was conscious that his love for her increased every day, and that no coldness on her part checked or dwarfed its growth. He sometimes wondered at himself for the depth and intensity of his passion, for he was a man who had passed almost unscathed heretofore from the shafts of the blind god, nor was he by nature impulsive or susceptible. But then Monica was like no woman he had ever met before, and from the very first she had exercised a curious fascination over him. Also their relative positions were peculiar; she the daughter and he the heir of the old earl, whose life was evidently so very frail. Randolph had a shrewd idea that his kinsman had little to leave apart from the entail, and in the event of his death what would become of the fair girl his daughter?

Would it be her fate to be placed in the keeping of that worldly spinster, the Lady Diana? Randolph's whole soul revolted from such an idea.

So, altogether, his interest in Monica was hardly more than natural, and his sense of protecting championship not entirely uncalled for. One thing he had resolutely determined upon—that she should never suffer directly or indirectly on his account. He had made no definite plans as regarded the future, but on that point his mind was made up.

To-day, for the first time, he ventured to allude to a subject hitherto never touched upon between them.

"You have a very beautiful home, Lady Monica," he said. "It is no wonder that you love it."

Her glance met his for a moment, and then her eyes dropped again.

"Is it true that you have never left Trevlyn all your life?"

"Except for a few days with Arthur, never."

"You have never seen London?"

"No, never," very emphatically.

"Nor wish to do so?"

"No."

He mused a little. Somehow it was more difficult than he had believed to convey to her the information he had desired to hint at. He entered upon another topic.

"Have you ever been advised, Lady Monica, to try what the German baths could do for Arthur? Very wonderful cures sometimes are accomplished there."

She raised her head suddenly, with something of a flash in her eyes.

"Tom Pendrill has been talking to you!"

"Indeed, no."

"That is what he wants — what he is always driving at. He does not care how my poor boy suffers, if only he has the pleasure of experimenting upon him for the benefit of science. I will not have it. It would kill him, it would kill me. You do not know how he suffers in being moved; a journey like that would be murder. He can live nowhere but at Trevlyn— Trevlyn or the neighbourhood, at least. Promise me never to suggest such a thing, never to take sides against me in it. Mr. Trevlyn, I appeal to your honour and your humanity. Promise me never to league

with Tom Pendrill to send Arthur away to die!"

He had never seen her so vehement or excited. He was astonished at the storm he had aroused.

"Indeed, Lady Monica, you may trust me," he said. "I have not the least wish to distress you, or to urge anything in opposition to your wishes. The idea merely occurred to me, because I happen to have heard of many wonderful cures. But I will never allude to the subject again if it distresses you. It is certainly not for me to dictate to you as to the welfare of your brother."

The flush of excitement had faded from Monica's face. She turned it towards him with something of apology and appeal

"Forgive me if I spoke too hastily," she

said, with a little quiver in her voice which he thought infinitely pathetic, "but I have so few to love, and the thought of losing them is so very sad. And then Tom has so often frightened me about Arthur and taking him away; and I know that I understand him better than anybody else, though I am not a doctor, nor a man of science."

He looked at her with grave sympathy.

"I think that is highly possible, Lady Monica. You may trust me to say or do nothing that could give you anxiety or pain."

"Thank you," answered Monica with unusual gentleness. "I do trust you."

His heart thrilled with gladness at those simple words. They had almost reached the church now, and Monica paused at

the edge of the cliff, turning her gaze seawards, a strange, sad wistfulness upon her face.

Her companion watched her in silence.

"There will be a storm before long," she said at last.

The air was curiously clear and still, and the sea the same; yet there was a sullen booming sound far below that sounded threatening and rather awful.

"You are weather-wise, Lady Monica?" he asked with a smile.

"I ought to be," she answered, turning away at length with a long drawn breath. "I know our sea so well, so very well."

And then she walked on and entered the church by her own little door, leaving Randolph musing alone without.

He, too, lunched with the Pendrills that

day. He had been over several times to see them since his arrival at Trevlyn, and had made his way in that house as successfully as he had done at the Castle.

Tom walked with him to church for the afternoon service. He spoke of Monica with great frankness.

"I have always likened her to a sort of Undine," he remarked, "though not in the generally accepted sense. There are latent capacities within her that might make her a very remarkable woman; but half her nature is sleeping still. According to the tradition, love must awake the slumbering soul. I often think it is that which wanted to transform and humanise my Lady Monica."

Randolph was silent. The smallest suspicion of criticism of Monica jarred

upon him. Tom saw this, and smiled to himself.

They reached the little cliff church long before the rustic congregation had begun to assemble. The sound of the organ was audible from within.

Tom laid his fingers on his lips and made a sign to his companion to follow him. They softly mounted a little quaint stairway towards the organ loft, and reached a spot where, hidden themselves by the dark shadows, they could watch the player as she sat before the instrument.

Monica had taken off her heavily-plumed hat, and the golden sunshine glowed about her fair head in a sort of mist of liquid brightness. Her face wore a dreamy, softened look, pathetically sad and sweet. Her lustrous dark eyes were full of feeling.

It seemed as if she were breathing out her soul in the sweet, low strains of music that sounded in the air.

Randolph gazed for one long minute, and then silently withdrew; it seemed a a kind of sacrilege to take her unawares like that, when she was unconscious of their presence.

"Saint Cecilia!" he murmured softly, as he descended the stairs once again. "Monica, my Monica! will you ever be mine in reality? Will you ever learn to love me?"

Monica's face still wore its softened dreamy look as she joined Randolph at the close of the service. Music exercised a strange power over her, raising her for a time above the level of the region in which she moved at other times. She

looked pale and a little tired, as if the strain of the week of anxiety about Arthur had not yet quite passed off. As they reached the top of the down and turned the angle of the cliff, the wind, which had been gradually rising all day and now blew half a gale, struck them with all its force, and Monica staggered a little beneath its sudden fury.

"Take my arm, Lady Monica," said Randolph. "This is too much for you."

"Thank you," she answered, gently; and a sudden thrill ran through Randolph's frame as he felt the clinging pressure of her hand upon his arm, and was conscious that she was grateful for the strong support against the fury of the elements.

"It will be a dreadful night at sea,"

said the girl presently, when a lull in the wind made speech more easy. "Look at the waves now? Are they not magnificent?"

The sea was looking very wild and grand; Randolph halted a moment beneath the shelter of a projecting crag, and gazed at the tempest-tossed ocean beneath.

"You like a storm at sea, Lady Monica?"

She looked at him with a sort of horror in her eyes.

"Like a storm!"

"You were admiring the grandeur of the sea just now."

"Ah, you do not understand!" she said, and gazed out before her, a far-away look in her eyes. Presently she spoke again, looking at him for a moment with a world of sadness in her eyes, and then away

over the tossing sea. "It is all very grand, very beautiful, very wonderful; but oh, so cruel, so pitiless in its strength and beauty! Think of the sailors, the fishermen out on the sea on a night like this, and the wives and mothers and little children, waiting at home for those who, perhaps, will never come back again. You do not understand. You belong to another world. You are not one of us. I have been down amongst them on wild, stormy nights. I have paced the beach with weeping women, watching, waiting for the boats that never came back, or came only to be dashed in pieces against the cruel rocks before our very eyes." She paused a moment, and he felt her shudder in every limb; but her voice was still low and quiet, just vibrating with the depth of her feelings, but very

calm and even. "I have seen boats go down within sight of home, within sound of our voices, almost within reach of our outstretched hands—almost, but not quite; and I have seen brave men, men I have known from childhood, swept away to their death, whilst we—their wives, their mothers, and I—have stood at the water's edge, powerless to succour them. Ah, you do not, you cannot understand! I have seen all that, and more—and you ask me if I like a storm at sea!"

She stood very still for a few seconds, and then took his arm again.

"Let us go home," she said, drooping a little as the wind met them once more. "I am so tired."

He sheltered her all he could against the fury of the gale, and presently they

were able to seek the shelter of the pine wood as they neared the Castle. Monica's face was very pale, and he looked at her with a gentle concern that somehow in no wise offended her.

"You are very tired," he said, compassionately. "The walk has been too much for you"

"Not the walk exactly," answered Monica, with a little falter in her voice; "it was the music and the storm together, I think. I am glad we sung the hymn for those at sea to-night."

He looked down at her earnestly.

"And yet the sea is your best friend, Lady Monica. You have told me so yourself." She looked at him with strange, wistful intensity.

"Yes, it is, it is," she answered; "my

best and earliest friend; and yet—and yet——"

She paused, falling into a deep reverie; he roused her by a question:

"Yet what, Lady Monica?"

Again that quick, strange glance.

"Do you believe in presentiments?"

"I am not sure that I do."

"Ah! then you cannot be a true Trevlyn. We Trevlyns have a strange forecasting power. Coming events cast their shadow over us, and we feel it—we feel it!"

He had never seen her in this mood before. He was intensely interested.

"And you have a presentiment, Lady Monica?"

She bent her head, but did not speak.

"And having said so much, will you not say more, and tell me what it is?"

She stopped still, looked earnestly at him for a moment, and then passed her hand wearily across her face.

"Sometimes I think," she said, "that it will be the great sea, my childhood's friend, that will bring to me the greatest sorrow of my life; for is it not the emblem of separation? Please take me in now. I think a storm is very sad and terrible."

He looked into her pale, sweet face, and perhaps there was something in his glance that touched her, for as they stood in the hall at last she looked up with a shadowy smile, and said:

"Thank you very much. You have been very kind to me."

That smile and those few simple words were like a ray of sunlight in his path.

CHAPTER THE SIXTH.

IN PERIL.

Perhaps there was some truth in what Monica had said about her ability to presage coming trouble. At least she was haunted just now by a strange shadow of approaching change that future events justified only too well.

She often caught her father's glance resting upon her with a strange, searching wistfulness, with something almost of pleading and appeal in his face. She had a suspicion that Arthur sometimes looked at her almost in the same way, as if he too would ask some favour of her, could he but bring his mind to do so.

She felt that she was watched by all the household, that something was expected of her, and was awaited with a sort of subdued expectency; but the nature of this service she had not fathomed, and greatly shrank from attempting to do so. She told herself many times that she would do anything for those she loved, that no sacrifice would be too great which should add to or secure their happiness; but she did not fully understand what was expected of her; only some instinct told her that it was in some way connected with Randolph Trevlyn.

Sir Conrad Fitzgerald came from time to time to the Castle. He was cordially received by the Earl and Lady Diana, who had respected and liked his parents, and remembered him well as a fair-haired

boy, the childish playfellow and friend of Monica and Arthur. Old feelings of intimacy sprang up anew after the lapse of time. It seemed as if he had hardly been more than a year or two away. It was difficult to realise that the young man was practically an entire stranger, of whose history they were absolutely ignorant.

Monica felt the change most by a certain instinctive and involuntary shrinking from Conrad that she could not in the least explain or justify. She wished to like him; she told herself that she did like him, and yet she was aware that she never felt at ease in his presence, and that he inspired her with a certain indescribable sense of repulsion, which, oddly enough, was shared by her four-footed friends, the dogs.

Monica had a theory of her own that dogs brought up much in human society became excellent judges of character, but if so, she ought certainly to modify some of her own opinions, for the dogs all adored Randolph, and welcomed him effusively whenever he appeared; but they shrank back sullenly when Conrad attempted to make advances, and no effort on his part conquered their instinctive aversion.

Conrad himself observed this, and it annoyed him. He greatly resented Randolph's protracted stay at the Castle, as he detested above all things the necessity of encountering him.

"How long is that fellow going to palm himself upon your father's hospitality?" he asked Monica one day, with some appearance of anger. He had encountered

Randolph and the Earl in the park as he came up, and he was aware that the cold formality of the greeting which passed between them had not been lost upon the keen observation of the latter. "I call it detestable taste hanging on here as he does. When is he leaving?"

"I do not know. Father enjoys his company, and so does Arthur. I have not heard anything about his going yet."

"Perhaps you enjoy his company too?" suggested Conrad, with a touch of insolence in his manner.

A faint flush rose in Monica's pale face. Her look expressed a good deal of cool scorn.

"Perhaps I do," she answered.

Conrad saw at once that he had made a blunder. Face and voice alike changed, and he said in his gentle, deprecating way:

"Forgive me, Monica. I had no right to speak as I did. It was rude and unjustifiable. Only if you knew as much as I do about that fellow, you would not wonder that I hate to see him hanging round you as he is doing now, waiting, as it were, to step into the place that is his by legal, but by no moral right. It would be hard to see anyone acting such a part. It is ten times harder when you know your man."

Monica looked straight at Conrad.

"What do you know against Mr. Trevlyn? My father is acquainted with all his past history, and can learn nothing to his discredit. What story have you got hold of? I would rather hear facts than hints."

Conrad laughed uneasily.

"I know that he is a cad, and a sneak, and a spy ; but I have no wish to upset your father's confidence in him. We were at Oxford together, and of course it was not pleasant to me to hear his boasting of his future lordship at Trevlyn. That was the first thing that made me dislike him. Later on I had fresh cause."

Had Monica been more conversant with the family history, she would have known that this boasting could never have taken place, as Randolph had been far enough from the peerage at that time. As it was, she looked grave and a little severe as she asked:

"Did he do that?" and listened with instinctive repugnance to the details fabricated by the inventive genius of Conrad.

He next cleverly alluded again to his past follies, and appealed to Monica's generosity not to change towards him because he had sinned.

"It is so hard to feel cast off by old friends," he said, with a very expressive look at the girl. "I know what it is to see myself cold shouldered by those to whom I have learned to look up with reverence and affection. I have suffered very much from misrepresentation and hardness—suffered beyond what I deserve. I did fall once—I was sorely tempted, and I did commit one act of ingratitude and deceit that I have most bitterly repented of. I was very young and sorely tempted, and I did something which might have placed me in the felon's dock, and would have done so had somebody not far away had his

will. But I was forgiven by the man I had injured, and I have tried my utmost since to make atonement for the past. The hardest part of all has been to see myself scorned and contemned by those whose good-will I have most wished to win. Sometimes I have known sorrow that has been akin to despair. I have been met with coldness and disdain when most I needed help and sympathy. Monica, you will not help to push me back into the abyss? You will not help to make me think that repentance is in vain?"

She looked at him very seriously, her eyes full of a sort of thoughtful surprise.

"I, Conrad. What have I to do with it or with you?"

"This much," he answered, taking her hand and looking straight into her eyes:

"this much, Monica—that nothing so helps a man who has fallen once as the friendship of a noble woman like yourself; nothing hurts him more than her ill-will or distrust. Give me your friendship, and I will make myself worthy of it; turn your back coldly upon me, and I shall feel doomed to despair."

"We have been friends all our lives, Conrad," said Monica, with gentle seriousness. "You know that if I could help you in the way you mean I should like to do so."

"You will not change—you will not turn your back upon me, whatever he may say of me?"

She looked at him steadily, and answered, "No."

"You promise, Monica?"

"There is no need for that, Conrad. When I say a thing I mean it. We are friends, and I do not change without sufficient reason."

He saw that he had said enough; he raised her hand to his lips and kissed it once with a humility and reverence that could not offend her. Monica wandered down by the lonely cliff path to the shore, revolving many thoughts in her mind, feeling strangely absorbed and abstracted.

The wind blew fresh and strong off the sea. The tide rolled in fast, salt, and strong. Monica felt that she wanted to be alone to-day—alone with the great wild ocean that she loved so well, even whilst she feared it too in its fiercer moods. She therefore made her way with the agility and sure-footed steadiness of

long practice over a number of great boulders, and along a jutting ledge of rock that stretched a considerable distance out to sea—a sunken reef that had brought to destruction many a hapless fisherman's craft, and more than one stately vessel.

At high tide it was covered, but it would not be high water for some hours yet, and Monica, in her restless state of mental tension, had forgotten that the high spring tides were lashing the sea to fury just now upon this iron-bound coast, rendered more swift and strong and high by the steady way in which the wind set towards the land.

Standing on the great flat rock at the end of the sunken reef, a rock that was never covered even at the highest tides, Monica was soon lost in so profound a

reverie that time flew by unheeded; and only when the giant waves began to throw their spray about her feet as they dashed up against the rock, did she suddenly rouse up to the consciousness that for once in her life she had forgotten herself, and forgotten the uncertain temper of her tyrant playfellow, and had allowed her retreat to be cut off.

She looked round her quietly and steadily, not frightened, but fully conscious of her danger. The reef was already covered; it would be impossible to retrace her footsteps with the waves dashing wildly over the sunken rocks. Monica was a bold and practised swimmer, but to swim ashore in a heavy sea such as was now running was obviously out of the question. To stand upon that lonely rock until the

tide fell again was a feat of strength and endurance almost equally impossible. Her best chance lay in being seen from the shore and rescued. Someone might pass that way, or even come in search of her. Only the daylight was already failing, and would soon be gone.

Monica looked round her, awed, yet calm, understanding, without realising, the deadly peril in which she stood. There was always a boat—her little boat—lying at anchor in the bay, ready for her use at any moment. Her eyes turned towards it instinctively, and as they did so she became aware of something bobbing up and down in the water—the head of a swimmer, as she saw the next moment, swimming out towards her boat.

Someone must have seen her, then, and

as all the fishing-smacks were out, and there was no way of reaching the anchored boat, save by swimming, had elected to run some personal risk rather than waste precious time in seeking aid farther afield.

A glow of gratitude towards her courageous rescuer filled Monica's heart, and this did not diminish as she saw the difficulty he had first in reaching the boat, then in casting it loose, and last, but not least, in guiding and pushing it towards an uncovered rock and in getting in. But this difficult and perilous office was accomplised in safety at last, and the boat was quickly rowed over the heaving, angry waves to the spot where Monica stood alone, amid the tossing waste of water.

Nearer and nearer came the tiny craft,

and Monica experienced an odd sensation of mingled surprise and dismay as she recognised in her preserver none other than Randolph Trevlyn.

But it was not a time in which speeches could be made or thanks spoken. To bring the boat up to the rock in the midst of the rolling breakers was a task of no little difficulty and danger, and had not Randolph been experienced from boyhood in matters pertaining to the sea, he could not possibly have accomplished the feat unaided and alone. There was no bungling on Monica's part, either. With steady nerve and quiet courage she awaited the moment for the downward spring. It was made at exactly the right second; the boat swayed, but righted itself immediately. Randolph had the head round in a moment away from the

dangerous rock. In ten minutes they had reached the shore and had landed upon the beach.

Not a word had been spoken all that time. Monica had given Randolph one expressive glance as she took her seat in the boat, and that is all that had so far passed between them.

When, however, he gave her his hand to help her to disembark, and they stood together on the shingle, she said, very seriously and gently:

"It was very kind of you to come out to me, Mr. Trevlyn. I think I should have been drowned but for you," and she turned her eyes seaward with a gaze that was utterly inscrutable.

He looked at her a moment intently, and then stooped and picked up his overcoat,

which lay beside his pilot jacket and boots, upon the stones.

"Will you oblige me by putting this on in place of your own wet jacket? You are drenched with spray."

She woke up from her reverie then, and looked up quickly, doing as he asked without a word; but when she had donned the warm protecting garment, she said:

"You are drenched to the skin yourself."

"Yes, so a garment more or less is of no consequence. Now walk on, please; do not wait for me; I will be after you in two minutes."

Again she did his bidding in the same dreamy way, and walked on towards the ascent by the steep cliff path. He was not long in following her, and they walked in

almost unbroken silence to the Castle. When they reached the portal, Monica paused, and raised her eyes once more to his face.

"You have saved my life to-day," she said. "I am—I think I am—very grateful to you."

Arthur's excitement and delight when he heard of the adventure were very great.

"So he saved you, Monica—at the risk of his life? Ah, that just proves it!"

"Proves what?"

"Why, that he is in love with you, of course, just as he ought to be, and will marry you some day, make us all happy; and keep us all at Trevlyn. What could be more delightful and appropriate?"

A wave of colour swept over Monica's face.

"You are a foolish boy, Arthur."

"I am not a foolish boy!" he answered, exultingly; "I know what I am saying. Randolph *does* love you; I can see it more plainly every day. He loves you with all his heart, and some day soon he will ask you to be his wife. Of course you will say yes—you must like him, I am sure, as much as every one else does; and then everything will come right, and we shall all be perfectly happy. Things always do come right in the end, if we only will but believe it."

Monica sat very still, a strange, dream-like feeling stealing over her. Arthur's playful words shed a sudden flood of light upon much that had been dark before, and for a moment she was blinded and dazzled.

Randolph Trevlyn loved her ! Yes, she could well believe it, little as she knew of love, thinking of the glance bent upon her not long ago, which had thrilled her then, she knew not why.

Monica trembled, yet she was dimly conscious of a strange under-current of startled joy beneath the troubled waters of doubt, despondency, and perplexity. She could not understand herself, nor read her heart aright, yet it seemed as if through the lifting of the clouds, she obtained a rapid passing glimpse of a land of golden sunshine beyond, whither her face and footsteps alike were turned—as a traveller amid the mountain mists sees before him now and again the bright sunny smiling valley beneath which he will shortly reach.

The land of promise was spreading itself

out already before Monica's eyes, and a dim perception in her heart was telling her that this was so. Yet the sandy desert path still lay before her for awhile, for like many others, her eyes were partially blinded, and she turned from the direct way, and wandered still for awhile in the arid waste. She lacked the faith to grasp the promise; but it was shining before her all the while, and in her heart of hearts she felt it, though she could not yet grasp the truth.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH.

"WILT THOU HAVE THIS WOMAN?"

Lord Trevlyn was not unobservant of the feelings with which Randolph regarded Monica. Quiet and self-contained as the young man was, his admiration and the pleasure he took in her society was still sufficiently obvious, and his own opinions were triumphantly endorsed by those of Lady Diana.

"He is over head and ears in love with her!" exclaimed that sharp-eyed dame to her brother, about a couple of days after Monica's rescue by Randolph, of which, however, she luckily knew nothing. Indeed, the story of that adventure had

only been told by the girl to Arthur and her father, and both had had the tact and discrimination not to broach the subject to Lady Diana.

"He is over head and ears in love with her, but she gives him not the smallest encouragement, the haughty minx! and he is modest, and keeps his feelings to himself. It seems to me that the time has come when you ought to speak out yourself, Trevlyn; we cannot expect to keep a gay young man like Randolph for ever in these solitudes. Speak to him yourself, and see if you cannot manage to bring about some proper understanding."

Lord Trevlyn had, in fact, some such idea in his own mind. He and his young kinsman were by this time upon easy and intimate terms. They felt a mutual liking

and respect, and had at times very nearly approached the subject so near to the hearts of both. That very night as they sat together in the earl's study, after the rest of the household had retired, Lord Trevlyn spoke to his guest with frankness and unreserve of the thoughts that had for long been stirring in his mind.

He spoke to his kinsman and heir of his anxieties as to the future of his dearly-loved and only child, who would at his death be only very inadequately provided for. He did not attempt to conceal the hope he had cherished in asking Randolph to be his guest, that some arrangement might be made which should conduce to her future happiness; and just as the young man's heart began to beat high with the tumult of conflicting feelings

within him, the old earl looked him steadily in the face, and concluded with a certain stately dignity that was exceedingly impressive.

"Randolph Trevlyn, I had heard much in your favour before I saw you, so much, indeed, that I ventured to entertain hopes that may sound scheming and cold-blooded when put into words, yet which do not, I trust, proceed from motives altogether unworthy. My daughter is very dear to me. To see her happily settled in life, under the protecting care of one who will truly love and cherish her, has been the deepest wish of my life. In our secluded existence here there has been small chance of realising this wish. I will not deny that in asking you to be our guest it was with hopes I need not farther specify. Some of

these hopes have been amply realised. I will not seem to flatter, yet let me say that in you I have found every quality I most hoped to see in the man who is to be my successor here. You are a true Trevlyn, and I am deeply thankful it is so; and besides this, I have lately entertained hopes that another wish of mine is slowly fulfilling itself. I have sometimes thought—let me say it plainly—that you have learned to love my daughter."

"Lord Trevlyn," said Randolph, with a calmness of manner that betokened deep feeling held resolutely under control, "I do love your daughter. I think I have done so ever since our first meeting. Every day that passes only serves to deepen my love. If I have your consent to try and win her hand, I shall count myself a happy man

indeed, although I fear her heart is not one to be easily moved or won."

Lord Trevlyn's face expressed a keen satisfaction and gladness. He held out his hand to his young kinsman, and said quietly:

"You have made a happy man of me, Randolph Trevlyn. In your hands I can place the future of my child with perfect confidence. You love her, and you will care for her, and make her life happy."

Randolph wrung the proffered hand.

"Indeed you may trust me to do all in my power. I love her with my whole heart. I would lay down my life to serve her."

"As you have demonstrated already," said the old earl, with a grave smile. "I have not thanked you for saving my child's life. I hope in the future she will repay

the debt by making your life happy, as you, I am convinced, will make hers."

Randolph's bronzed cheek flushed a little at these words.

"Lord Trevlyn," he said, "to gain your goodwill and assent in this matter is a source of great satisfaction to me; but I cannot blind my eyes to the fear that Lady Monica herself, with whom the decision must rest, has not so far given me any encouragement to hope that she regards me as anything beyond a mere acquaintance and chance guest. I love her too well, I think, not to be well aware of her feelings towards me, and I cannot flatter myself for a moment by the belief that these are anything warmer than a sort of gentle liking, little removed from indifference."

The earl's face was full of thought.

"Monica's nature is peculiar," he said; "her feelings lie very deep, and are difficult to read; no one can really know what they may be."

"I admit that; yet I confess I have little hope—at least in the present."

"Whilst I," said Lord Trevlyn, quietly, "have little fear."

An eager look crossed Randolph's face.

"You think——"

"I cannot easily explain what I think, but I believe there will be less difficulty with Monica than you anticipate. She does not yet know her own heart—that I admit. She may be startled at first, but that is not necessarily against us. Will you let me break this matter to her? Will you let me act as your ambassador? I understand Monica as you can hardly do.

Will you let me see if I cannot plead your cause as eloquently as you can do it for yourself? Trust me it will be better so. My daughter and I understand one another well."

Randolph was silent a moment, then he said, very gravely and seriously:

"If you think that it will be best so, I gladly place myself in your hands. I confess I should find it difficult to approach the subject myself—at any rate at present. But"—he paused a moment, and looked the other full in the face—"pardon me for saying as much—you do not propose putting any pressure upon your daughter? Believe me, I would rather never see her face again than feel that she accepted me as a husband under any kind of compulsion or restraint."

Lord Trevlyn smiled a smile of approval.

"You need not fear," he answered, quietly. "Monica's nature is not one to submit tamely to any kind of coercion, nor am I the man to attempt to constrain her feelings upon a matter so important as this."

"And if," pursued Randolph, with quiet resolution, "Lady Monica declines the proposal made to her on my behalf, I shall request you to join with me in breaking the entail; for I can never consent to be the means of taking from her that which by every moral right is hers. I could not for a moment tolerate the idea of wresting from her the right to style herself, as she has always been styled, the Lady of Trevlyn. This is her rightful home, and I shall appeal to you, if my suit fails, to assist me in installing her there for life."

The old earl looked much moved.

"This is very noble of you—most noble and generous: but we will not talk of it yet. I am not sure that I could bring myself to help in separating the old title from the old estate. You are very generous to think of making the sacrifice; whether I ought to permit you to do so is another thing. At least let us wait and see what our first negotiation brings forth. Monica ought to know——" he paused, smiled, and held out his hand. "Good-night. I will speak to my daughter upon the first opportunity. You shall have your answer to-morrow."

The next day Randolph spent at St. Maws with Tom Pendrill. He felt that whilst his fate hung in the balance it would be impossible to remain at Trevlyn.

He rode across to his friend's house quite early in the day, and twilight had fallen before he eturned to the sombre precincts of the Castle.

He made his way straight to the earl's study; the old man rose quickly upon his entrance, and held out his hand. His face beamed with an inward happiness and satisfaction.

"I wish you joy, Randolph," he said, wringing the young man's hand. "We may congratulate each other, I think. Monica is yours — take her, with her father's blessing. It seems to me as if I had nothing left to wish for now, save to see you made my son, for such indeed you are to me now."

Randolph stood very still. He could hardly believe his own ears. He had not

for a moment expected any definite answer, save a definite refusal.

"Lady Monica consents to be my wife?" he questioned. "Are you sure that this is so?"

"I am quite sure. I had it from her own lips."

Randolph's breath came rather fast.

"Does she love me?"

"Presumably she does. Monica would never give her hand for the sake of rank or wealth."

"No, no," he answered quickly, and took one or two turns about the darkening room. He was in a strange tumult of conflicting feeling, and did not hear or heed the low-spoken words addressed to the servant, who had just entered with fresh logs for the fire. His heart was

beating wildly; he knew not what to think or hope. He asked no more questions, not knowing what to ask.

And then all at once he saw Monica standing before him, standing with one hand closely locked in that of her father, looking gravely at him in the shadowy twilight, with an inscrutable wistful sweetness in her fathomless eyes.

"Randolph," said Lord Trevlyn, "here is your promised wife. I give her to you with my blessing. May you both be as happy as you have made me to-day by this mutual act. Be very good to her, guard her and shield her, and love her tenderly. She is used to love and care from her father; let me feel that in her husband's keeping she will gain and not lose by the change in her future life. Monica, my

child, love your husband truly and faithfully. He is worthy of you, and you are worthy of him."

Lord Trevlyn placed the hand he held within Randolph's grasp, and silently withdrew.

For a moment neither moved nor spoke. The young man held the hand of his promised wife between both of his, and stood quite still, looking down with strange intensity of feeling into the half-averted face.

"Monica," he said at last, "can this be true?"

She lifted her eyes to his for a moment, and then dropped them before his burning glance.

"Monica," he said again, "can it be true that you love me?"

"I will be your wife if you will have me," she said, in a very clear, low tone. "I will love you—if I can. I will try, indeed. I think I can—some day."

He was too passionately in love himself at that moment to be chilled by this response. It was more than he had ever looked for, that sweet surrender of herself. Protestations of love would sound strangely from Monica's lips. He hardly even wished to hear them. She must feel some tenderness towards him. She had given herself to him to love and cherish; surely his great love could accomplish the rest.

He drew her gently towards him. She did not resist; she let herself be encircled by his protecting arm.

"I will try to make you very happy," he said, with a sort of manly simplicity

that meant more than the most ardent protestations could have done. "May I kiss you, Monica?"

She lifted her down-bent face a little, and he pressed a kiss upon her brow. She made no attempt to return the caress, but he did not expect it. It was enough that she permitted him to worship her.

"You have made me very happy, Monica," he said presently, whilst the shadows deepened round them. "Will you not let me hear you say that you are happy too?"

She looked at him at last. He could not read the meaning of that gaze.

"I want to make you happy, my darling," said Randolph, very softly.

Again that strange, earnest gaze.

"Make my father and Arthur happy,"

she said, sweetly and steadily, "and I shall be happy too."

He did not understand the full drift of those words, as he might perhaps have done had he been calmer—did not realise as at another moment he might have done their deep significance. He was desperately, passionately in love, carried away inwardly, if not outwardly, by the tumult of his feelings. He did not realise—it was hardly likely that he should—that to secure her father's happiness and the future well-being and happiness of her brother Monica had promised to be his wife. She respected him, she liked him, she was resolved to make him a true and faithful wife; and she knew so little of the true nature of wedded love that it never occurred to her to think of the injury she might be doing

to him in giving the hand without the heart.

She had been moved and disquieted by Arthur's words of a few days back. Her father's appeal to her that day had touched her to the quick. What better could she do with her life than secure with it the happiness of those she loved? How better could she keep her vow towards Arthur than by making the promise asked of her? Monica thought first of others in this matter, it is true, and yet there was a strange throb akin to joy deep down in her heart, when she thought of the love tendered to her by one she had learned to esteem and to trust. Those sweet, sudden glimpses of the golden land of sunshine beyond kept flashing before her eyes, and thrilled her with feelings that made her

almost afraid. She did not know what it all meant. She did not know that it was but the foreshadowing of the deep love that was rooting itself, all unknown, in the tenderest fibres of her nature. She never thought she loved Randolph Trevlyn, but she was conscious of a strange exultation and stress of feeling, which she attributed to the enthusiasm of the sacrifice she had made for those she loved. She did not yet know the secret of her own heart.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTH.

"WOO'D, AND MARRIED, AND A'."

So Monica had engaged herself to her kinsman, Randolph Trevlyn, and the neighbourhood, though decidedly astonished at this sudden surrender of liberty on the part of the fair, unapproachable girl, could not but see how desirable was the match from every point of view, and rejoice in the thought that Trevlyn would never lose its well-loved lady.

As for Monica herself, the days passed by as in a dream—a strong dream of misty sunshine and sweet, faint fragrance, through which she wandered with un-

certain steps, led onward by a sense of brighter light beyond.

She was not unhappy; indeed, a strange new sense of calm and rest had fallen upon her since she had laid her hand in Randolph's and promised to love him if she could. A few short weeks ago how she would have chafed against the fetters she wore! Now she hardly felt them as fetters; they neither galled nor hurt her. Indeed, after the feeling of uncertainty, of impending change that had hung over her of late, this peaceful calm was doubly grateful. It seemed at last as if she had reached the shelter of a safe haven, and pausing there, with a sense of grateful well-being, she felt as if no storm or tempest could ever reach her again.

Monica's nature was not introspective;

she did not easily analyse her feelings. Had she done so now, she might have laid bare a secret deep down within her that would have surprised her not a little; but she never attempted to look into her heart, she rather avoided definite thought; she lived in a sort of vaguely sweet dream, glad and thankful for the undercurrent of happiness which had so unexpectedly crept into her life. She did not seek to know its source —it was enough that it was there.

Randolph was very good to her, she did not attempt to deny that. Nothing could have been more tender and chivalrous than his manner towards her. He arrogated none of the rights which an affianced husband might fairly have claimed; he was content with what she gave him; he never tried to force her confidence or to win

words or promises that did not come spontaneously to her lips.

She was shy with him for some time after the engagement had been ratified, more silent and reserved than she had been before; yet there was a charm in her very silence that went home to his heart, and he felt that she was nearer to him day by day.

"I will win her yet—heart and soul," he would say sometimes, with a thrill of proud joy as he looked into the sweet eyes raised to his, and read a something in their depths that made his heart throb gladly. "Give me time, only time, and she shall be altogether mine."

She never shunned him. She let him be her companion when and where he would, and she began to look for him, and to feel

more satisfied when he was at her side. He was too wise to overdo her with his society, or seem to infringe the liberty in which she had grown up; but he frequently accompanied her on her walks or rides, and he had the satisfaction of feeling that his presence was not distasteful to her; indeed, as days went by, and she grew used to the idea that had been at first so strange, he fancied that there was something of welcome in the smile that greeted his approach.

She never spoke of the future when they should be man and wife, and only by a hint here and there did he broach the subject or tell of his private affairs. Both were content for the time being to live in the present—that present that seemed so calm and bright and full of promise.

As days and weeks fled by, a colour dawned upon Monica's cheeks and a light in her eyes; she grew more beautiful every day or so, thought those who loved her, and watched her with loving scrutiny; and Mrs. Pendrill, who was, so to speak, the girl's good angel in this crisis of her life, would caress the golden head sometimes, and ask with gentle, motherly solicitude:

"My Monica is happy, is she not?"

"I think so, Aunt Elizabeth," Monica answered once, speaking out more freely than she had done before. "Other people are happy — the dread and uncertainty about the future seems all gone. Trevlyn is not sad any longer—it is my own home again, my very own. I cannot quite express it, but something seems to have come into my life and changed everything.

I am happy often now—nearly always, I think."

Mrs. Pendrill smiled a little.

"Does your happiness result from the knowledge that you—you and Arthur: I suppose I must include him—need never leave Trevlyn, and that you have pleased your father? Tell me, Monica, is that all?"

A faint colour mantled the girl's face.

"I know it sounds selfish; but I hardly think anyone knows what Trevlyn is to us, and what Arthur's welfare is to me." Then reading the meaning of the earnest glance bent upon her, she added quickly, "Ah, yes, Aunt Elizabeth, I know there is *that* too. He is very, very good to me, and I will do everything to make him happy, and to be a good wife when the time comes.

Indeed, I do think of him. I know what he is, and what he deserves—only—only I cannot talk about that even to you."

"I do not want you to talk, my love, I only want you to feel."

And very low the answer was spoken.

"I think I do feel."

Certainly things were going well, very well. It seemed as if the course of Randolph's true love might run smoothly enough to the very end now. Tom Pendrill chaffed him somewhat mercilessly on the easy victory he had obtained over the somewhat difficult subject, and he felt an exultant sense of joyful triumph when he compared his position of to-day with the one he had occupied a week or two back. Monica's gentleness and growing dependence upon him were inexpressibly sweet,

the dawn of a quiet happiness in her face filled his heart with delight. The victory was not quite won yet, but he began to feel a confidence that it was not far distant.

And this hope would in all probability have been realised in due course, had it not been for untoward circumstances, and from the presence of enemies in the camp, one his sworn foe, the other his champion and ally: but despite this, a born mischief-maker and mar-plot.

So long as Randolph was on the spot all went well. His strong will dominated all others, and his influence upon Monica produced its own effect. Love like his could not but win its way to the heart of the woman he loved.

But Randolph could not remain always

at Trevlyn. Hard as it was to tear himself away, the conventionalities of life demanded his absence from time to time, and other duties called him elsewhere. And it was when his back was fairly turned that the mischief-makers began their task of undoing, as far as was possible, all the good that had been done.

Randolph had been exceedingly careful to say nothing to Monica about hastening their marriage. He saw that she took for granted a long engagement, that she had hardly contemplated as yet the inevitable end whither that engagement tended; and until he had assured himself that her heart was wholly his, nothing would have induced him to ask her to give herself irrevocably to him. When the right moment came she would surrender herself

willingly, for Monica was not one who would do anything by halves. Till that day came, however, he was resolved to wait, and breathe no word of the future that awaited them.

Lady Diana was of a different way of thinking. She had been amazed at Monica's pliability in the matter of her engagement, so surprised and so well pleased that, for some considerable time, she had acted with unusual discretion, and had avoided saying anything to irritate or alarm the sensitive feelings of her niece. Possibly she stood in a little unconscious awe of Randolph, for certainly so long as he remained she was quiet and discreet enough. But when his presence was once removed, then began a system of petty persecution and annoyance that was the very

thing to rouse in Monica a spirit of opposition and hostility.

Lady Diana had set her heart upon a speedy marriage, half afraid that her niece might change her mind; she took a half spiteful pleasure in the knowledge that the girl's independence was at last to be curbed, and that she was about to take upon herself the common lot of womanhood. She lost no opportunities of reading homilies on wifely submission and subjection. She bestirred herself over the matter of the *trousseau* as if the day were actually fixed, and Monica's indignant protests were laughed at and ignored as if too childish for serious argument.

The girl began to observe, too, that her father spoke of her marriage as of something speedily approaching, and that he,

Lady Diana, and even Arthur, seemed to understand that she would spend much of her time away from Trevlyn, when once that ceremony had taken place. Her father and brother spoke cheerfully of her leaving them, taking it for granted that her affianced husband was first in her thoughts, and that they must make her way easy to go away with him, without one regret for those left behind. Lady Diana, with more of feminine insight, had less of kindliness in her method of approaching the subject; but when she found them all agreed upon the point, the girl felt almost as if she had been betrayed. There was no Randolph to shield and protect her. She could not put into written words the tumult of her conflicting feelings; she could only struggle and suffer, and feel like a wild thing trapped in

the hunter's toils. Ah, if only Randolph had not left her! But when the poison had done its work, she ceased even to wish for him back.

Another enemy to her peace of mind was Conrad Fitzgerald. Monica was growing to feel a great repugnance to this fair-haired, smooth-tongued man, despite the nominal friendship that existed between him and those of her name. She knew that her feelings were changing towards him; but, like other young things, she was ashamed of any such change, regarding it as treacherous and ungenerous, especially after the pledge she had given him.

Conrad thus found opportunities of seeing her from time to time, and set to work with malicious pleasure to poison

her mind against her affianced husband. She would not listen to a single direct word against him: that he discovered almost at once, somewhat to his astonishment and chagrin; but "there are more ways of killing a cat than by hanging it," as he said to himself; and a well-directed shaft steeped in poison, and launched with a practised hand, struck home and did its work only too well.

He insinuated that after her marriage Trevlyn would never be her home during her father's life-time, at least, possibly never any more. Randolph had property of his own; was it likely he would bury himself and his beautiful young wife in a desolate place like that? Of course her care of Arthur would be a thing entirely put on one side. It was out of the question that

she should ever be allowed to devote herself to him as of old, when once she had placed her neck beneath the matrimonial yoke. Most likely some excuse would be forthcoming to rid Trevlyn of the undesirable presence of the invalid. Randolph was not a man to be deterred by any nice scruples from going his own way. Words spoken before marriage were never regarded seriously when once the inevitable step had been taken.

Monica heard, and partly believed—believed enough to make her restless and miserable. Never a word crossed her lips that could show her trust in Randolph shaken. She was loyal to him outwardly, but she suffered keenly, nevertheless. He was not there to give her confidence, as he could well have done, by his unwaver-

ing love and devotion, and in his absence, the influence he had won slowly waned, and the old fear and distrust crept back.

It might have vanished had he returned to charm it away: but, alas! he only came to make Monica his wife in sudden, unexpected fashion, before her heart was really won.

Lord Trevlyn had been taken dangerously ill. It was an attack similar to those he had suffered from once or twice before, but in a more severe form. His life was in imminent danger; nothing could save him, the doctors agreed, but the most perfect rest of body and mind; and it seemed as if only the satisfaction of calling Randolph son, of seeing him Monica's husband, could secure to him that repose of spirit so absolutely essential to his recovery.

Monica did not waver when her father looked pleadingly into her face, and asked if she were ready. Her assent was calmly and firmly spoken, and after that she left all in other hands, and did not quit her father's presence night or day.

He was better for the knowledge that the wish of his heart was about to be consummated, and she was so utterly absorbed in him as to be all but unconscious of the flight of time. She knew that days sped by as on wings. She even heard them speak of "to-morrow" without any stirring of heart. She was absorbed in care for her almost dying father; she had no thought to spare for aught else.

On the evening of that day Randolph stood before her, holding her hands in his warm clasp.

"Is this your wish, my Monica?"

She thrilled a little beneath his ardent gaze, a momentary sense of comfort and protection came over her in his presence; but physical languour blunted her feelings; she was too weary even to feel acutely.

"It is my wish," she answered gently.

He bent his head and kissed her tenderly and lingeringly, looking earnestly into the pale, sweet face that seemed not quite so responsive as it had done when he saw it last; but he could not read the look it wore. He kissed her and went away, breathing half sadly, half triumphantly, the word "To-morrow."

Lady Diana, ever indefatigable and contriving, had managed as if by magic to have all things in readiness; rich white

satin and brocade, orange blossom and lace veil—all was in readiness—as if she had had weeks for her preparations.

Monica started and half recoiled as she saw the bridal dress laid out for her adornment, but she was quiet and passive in the hands of her attendants as they arrayed her in her snowy robes, and well she repaid their efforts. Only Lady Diana felt any dissatisfaction.

"Why, child," she said, impatiently, "you look like a snow maiden. You might be a nun about to take the veil instead of a bride going to her wedding. I have no patience with such pale looks. Randolph will think we have brought him a corpse for his bride."

Randolph was waiting in the little church on the cliff. His heart beat thick

and fast; he himself began to feel as if he were living in a dream. He could not realise that the time had come when he was to call Monica his own.

Lady Diana and Mrs. Pendrill were there, and a friend of his own, young Lord Haddon, who had accompanied him from town the previous day, to play the part of best man at the ceremony. There was a little rustle and little stir outside, and then Monica entered, leaning on Tom Pendrill's arm, and, without once lifting her eyes, walked steadily up the church, till she stood beside Randolph.

Never, perhaps, had she looked more lovely, yet never, perhaps, more remote and unapproachable, than when she stood before the altar in her bridal robes, to pledge herself for better for worse to the

man who loved her, till death should them part.

He looked at her with a strange pang and aching at heart; but the moment was not one when hesitation or drawing back was possible.

In a few more minutes Monica and Randolph Trevlyn were made man and wife.

CHAPTER THE NINTH.

MARRIED.

"MARRIED! Married! Married!"

The monstrous vibrating throb of the express train seemed ceaselessly repeating that one word. The sound of it was beaten in upon Monica's brain as with hot hammers, and yet she did not feel as if she understood what it meant, or realised what happened to her. One thing only was clear to her; that she had been torn away from Trevlyn, from her father, who, though pronounced convalescent, was still in a very precarious state; from Arthur, who after the anxiety and excitement of

the past days, was prostrated by a sharp attack of illness; from everything and everybody she held most dear; and cast as it were upon the mercy of a comparative stranger, who did not seem the less strange to her, because he had the right to call himself her husband.

What had happened during the three days that had passed since Monica had stood beside Randolph in the little cliff church, and had pledged herself to him for better or worse?

She herself could not have said, but the facts can be summed up in a few words.

When once Lord Trevlyn had seen Monica led by Randolph to his bedside in her bridal white, and knew that they were man and wife, a change for the better had taken place in his condition, very slight at

first, but increasing every hour. Little by little the danger passed away, and for the time at least his life was safe.

But Monica's mind, no sooner relieved on his account, was thrown into fresh misery and suspense by a bad attack of illness on Arthur's part, and the strain upon her was so great, that, coming as it did after all the mental conflict she had lately endured, her own health threatened to break down, and this caused no small anxiety in the minds of all about her.

"There is only one thing to be done, and that is to take her right away out of it all," said Tom Pendrill, with authority, "She will break down as sure as fate if she stays here. The associations of the place are quite too much for her. She will have a brain or nervous fever if she is not taken

away. You have a house in London, Trevlyn? Take her there and keep her quiet, but let her have change of scene; let her see fresh faces, and get into new habits, and see the world from a fresh stand-point. It will do her all the good in the world. She may rebel at first, and think herself miserable; but look at her now. What can be worse than the way in which she is going on? Trevlyn is killing her, whether she knows it or not. Let us see what London can do for her."

No dissentient voice was raised against this suggestion. The earl, Lady Diana, Randolph, and even Arthur, were all in accord, and Monica heard her sentence with that unnatural quietude that had disturbed them all so much.

She did not protest or rebel, but accepted

her fate very quietly, as she had accepted the marriage that had been the preliminary step.

How white she looked as she lay back in her corner of the carriage! how lonely, how frail, how desolate! Randolph's heart ached for her, for he knew her thoughts were with her sick father and suffering brother; knew that it, not unnaturally, seemed very, very hard to be taken away at a crisis such as the present. She could not estimate the causes that made a change so imperative for her. She could not see why she was hurried away so relentlessly. It had all been very hard upon her, and upon him also, had he had thought to spare for himself; but he was too much absorbed in sorrow for her to consider his own position over-much.

He was indirectly the cause of her grief, and his whole being was absorbed in the longing to comfort her.

She looked so white and wan as the hours passed by, that he grew alarmed about her. He had done before all he could to make her warm and comfortable, and had then withdrawn a little, fancying his close proximity distasteful to her, but she looked so ill at last that he could keep away no longer, and came over to her, taking her hand in his.

"Monica," he said gently.

The long lashes stirred a little and slowly lifted themselves. The dark eyes were dim and full of trouble. She looked at him wonderingly for a moment, almost as if she did not know him, and then she closed her eyes with a little shuddering sigh.

He was alarmed, and not without cause, for the strain of the past days was showing itself now, and want of rest and sleep had worn down her strength to the lowest ebb. She was so faint and weary that all power of resistance had left her. She let her husband do what he would, submitted passively to be tended like a child, and heaved a sigh that sounded almost like one of relief as he drew her towards him, so that her weary head could rest upon his broad shoulder. There was something restful and supporting, of which she was dumbly conscious in the deep love and protecting gentleness of this strong man.

She only spoke once to him, and that was as they neared their destination, and the lights of the great city began to flash upon her bewildered gaze. Then she sat

up, though with an effort, and looking at her husband, said gently:

"You have been very good to me, Randolph."

His heart bounded at the words, but he only asked. "Are you better, Monica?"

She pressed her hand to her brow.

"My head aches so," she said, and the white strained look came back to her face. She was almost frightened by the flashing lights and the myriads of people she saw as the train steamed into the terminus; and she could only cling to Randolph's arm in hopeless bewilderment, as he piloted her through the crowd to the carriage that was awaiting them.

Randolph owned a house near to the Park, in a pleasant open situation. It had been left to him by an uncle, a great

traveller, and was quite a museum of costly and interesting treasures, and fitted up in the luxurious fashion that appeals to men who have grown used to Oriental ease and splendour.

The young man had often pictured Monica in such surroundings, had wondered what she would say to it all, how she would feel in a place so strange and unlike anything she had ever known. He had fancied that the open situation of the house would please her, that she might be pleased too by the quaint beauty and harmony of all she saw. He had often pictured the moment when he should lead her into her new home and bid her welcome there, and now, when the time had come, she was so worn out and ill that her heavy eyes could hardly look

around her, and all he could do was to support her to her room, to be tended by his old nurse, Wilberforce, whose services he had bespoken for his wife in preference to those of a more youthful and accomplished *femme de chambre.*

For some days Monica was really ill, not with any specific complaint, but prostrated by nervous exhaustion — too weary and exhausted to have a clear idea of what went on around her, only conscious that everything was very strange, that she was far away from Trevlyn, and that strangers were watching over and tending her.

Her husband's care was unremitting. He was ever by her side. She seemed to turn to him instinctively amid the other strange faces, and to be more quiet and

tranquil when he was near. Yet she seldom spoke to him; he was not always certain that she knew him; but that half unconscious dependence was inexpressibly sweet, and Randolph felt hope growing stronger day by day. Surely she was slowly learning to love him; and indeed she was, only she knew it not as yet.

Then a day came when the feverish fancies and distressful exhaustion gave way to more cheering symptoms. Monica could leave her room, and leaning on her husband's arm, wander slowly about the new home that looked so strange to her. The smiles began to come back to her eyes, a faint flush of colour to her cheeks, and when at length she was laid down upon a luxurious ottoman beside the drawing-room

fire, she held her husband's hand between both of hers, and looked up at him with a glance that went to his very heart.

"You have been so very, very good to me, Randolph, though I have only been a trouble to you all this time. I never thought I could feel like this away from Trevlyn. Indeed I will try to make you happy too."

He bent down and kissed her, a thrill of intense joy running through him.

"Does that mean that you can be happy here, my Monica?" he asked.

She was always perfectly truthful, and paused a little before answering; yet there was a light in her eyes and a little smile upon her lips.

"It feels very strange," she said, "and very like a dream. Of course I miss

Trevlyn—of course I would rather be there; but——" and here she lifted her eyes with the sweetest glance of trusting confidence. "I know that you know best, Randolph, I know that you judge more wisely than I can do; and that you always think of my happiness first. You have been very, very good to me all this time, far better than I deserve. I am going to be happy here, and when I may go home, I know you will be the first to take me there."

He laid his hand upon her head in a tender caress.

"I will, indeed, my Monica," he answered; "but, believe me, for the present you are better here. You will grow strong faster away from Trevlyn than near it."

She smiled a little, very sweetly.

"I will try to think so, too, Randolph, for I am very sure that you are wiser than I; and I have learned how good you are to me—always."

That evening passed very quietly, yet very happily.

Was this the beginning of better things to come?

CHAPTER THE TENTH.

MISCHIEF-MAKERS.

"Now that you have been a fortnight in town, and have begun to feel settled in your new life," wrote Lady Diana, "I think it is time you should be made aware of a few facts relative to your engagement and marriage, which you are not likely to hear from the lips of your too indulgent husband, but with which, nevertheless, you ought to be made conversant, in my opinion, in order that you may the better appreciate the generous sacrifices made on behalf of you and your family, and return

him the measure of gratitude he deserves for the benefits he has bestowed."

Monica was alone when she received this letter, breakfasting in her little boudoir at a late hour, for although almost recovered now, she had not yet resumed her old habit of early rising.

She had risen this morning feeling more light at heart than usual. She had chatted with unusual freedom to her husband, had kissed him before he went out to keep an appointment with his lawyer, and had promised to ride with him at twelve o'clock, if he would come back for her. She had only once been out since her arrival in town, and that was in the carriage. She was quite excited at the prospect of being in the saddle again. She had almost told herself that she

should yet be happy in her married life—and now came this cruel, cruel letter to dash to the ground all her faint dawning hopes.

Lady Diana had felt very well-disposed, even if a little spiteful, as she had penned this unlucky letter; but she certainly was not nice in her choice of words or of epithets. Not being sensitive herself, she had little comprehension of the susceptibilities of others, and the impression its perusal conveyed to the mind of Monica was that Randolph had married her simply out of generosity to herself and regard for her father: that the proposal was none of his own making, and that his unvarying kindness arose from his knowledge of her very difficult temper, and a wish to secure for himself by bribes and caresses a peaceful home and an amiable wife. In conclusion

it was added that Monica, in return for all that had been done for her, must do her utmost to please and gratify him. Of course he would wish to show his beautiful wife in the world of fashion to which he belonged. He would wish her to join in the life of social gaiety to which he was about to introduce her, and any hanging back on her part would be most unbecoming and ungrateful. It behoved her to keep in mind all these facts, to remember the sacrifices he had made for her, and to act accordingly. He had not chosen a wife from his own world, as it was presumable he would have preferred to do. He had consented to the family match proposed to him, and she must do her utmost to make up to him for the sacrifice he had made.

A few weeks back such a letter, though it might have hurt Monica's pride, would not have cut her to the quick, as it did now. In the first place, she would then have simply disbelieved it, whereas recent circumstances had given her a very much greater respect for the opinions of those who knew the world so much better than she did, and who had forecasted so accurately events that had afterwards fulfilled themselves almost as a matter of course. She had begun to distrust her own convictions, to believe more in those of others, who had had experience of life, and could estimate its chances better than she could. She believed her aunt when she told her these things, and the poisoned shaft struck home to her heart. A few days ago she could have borne it better.

Her pride would have been hurt, but the sting would have been less keen. She did not know why the doubt of her husband's love hurt her so cruelly; but hurt her it did, and for a moment she felt stricken to the earth. She had said to herself many times that she did not want such a wealth of love, when she had none on her side to bestow; but yet, when she had learned that it was not hers after all, but was only the counterfeit coin of a hollow world—the bribe by which her submission and gratitude were to be obtained—the knowledge was unspeakably bitter. She felt she would rather have died than have been forced to doubt.

As she dressed for her ride, pride came to the assistance of her crushed spirit. Wilberforce, the faithful servant who had

tended and loved Randolph from his infancy, and was ready to love his wife for his sake and her own, was aware of a subtle change in her young mistress that she did not understand, and which she could not well have described. Monica had been very quiet and gentle since her arrival, and very silent too. She was quiet enough to-day; but the gentleness had been replaced by a certain inexplicable *hauteur*. The pale face wore a glow of warm colour; the dark eyes that had been languid and heavy were wide open and full of fire. Monica looked superbly handsome in the brilliant radiance of her beauty, and yet the faithful attendant was not certain that she liked the change in her.

Randolph detected it the moment

he entered the room, and found his wife equipped for the proposed ride.

"Why, Monica," he said, smiling, "you have got quite a colour. It looks natural to see you dressed for the saddle."

"Yes," she answered, coolly: "we must turn over a new leaf now, must we not? You will be dying of *ennui* cooped up at home so long. Let us go out and enjoy ourselves. We must learn to do in Rome as Rome does."

Randolph felt one keen pang of disappointment that the first return to health and strength should have brought a return of the former coldness and aloofness; but he had gained ground before, and why not now? Could he expect to win his way without a single repulse? So he took courage, and tried to ignore the change he saw in his wife.

He led her down the staircase to the hall door where the horses were waiting, and he saw the sudden flash of joyful recognition that crossed her face.

"Guy!" she exclaimed, "my own little Guy!"

Yes, there could be no mistake about it; it was her own little delicate thorough-bred, standing with ill-repressed exitement at the door, his glossy neck arched in a sort of proud impatience, his supple limbs trembling with eagerness, as he stepped daintily to and fro upon the pavement. He turned his shapely head at the sound of Monica's voice, pricked his ears, and uttered a low whinney of joyful recognition.

"It was good of you to think of it, Randolph," she said, a softer light in her eyes as she turned them towards her

husband. "It is like a little bit of home having him."

"I thought you would like him better than a stranger, though I have his counterpart in the stable waiting for you to try. He has been regularly exercised in Piccadilly every morning, and I coaxed him to let me ride him once myself in the Park, though he did not much like it. I don't think he will be very troublesome now, and I know you are not afraid of his restive moods; though this is very different from Trevlyn."

Monica's eyes grew wistful, and her husband saw it. He guessed whither her thoughts had fled, and he let her dream on undisturbed. He exchanged bows with many acquaintances as they passed onwards and entered the Row, and many admiring glances were levelled at his beautiful

young wife, whose unusual loveliness and perfect horsemanship alike attracted attention; but he attempted no introductions; and Monica, dreamy and absorbed, noticed nothing, till the sight of Conrad in the Row awoke her to consciousnesss of her surroundings.

Conrad in London! How long had he been there? Did he bring news from Trevlyn? She looked almost wistfully at Randolph as she returned the young baronet's bow, but his face wore its rather stern expression, and she dared not attempt to speak with her former friend.

Conrad, however, saw the look, and smiled to himself.

"My day will come yet," he said.

"Shall we push on, Monica?" asked Randolph. "Guy is aching to stretch his limbs.'

Monica was only too willing, and they had soon reached the farther end of the Row, which was much less full than the other had been.

A pretty, dark, vivacious looking girl, accompanied by a fair-haired young man, rather like her, were approaching with glances of recognition.

"Randolph, I am angry with you—yes, very angry. You have been a whole fortnight in town—I heard so yesterday—and we have never seen you once, and you have never let me have the pleasure of an introduction to your wife. I call it very much too bad!"

"Well, it is never too late to mend," answered Randolph, smiling. "Monica, may I present to you Lady Beatrice Wentworth, whom I have had the honour of

knowing intimately since the days of our early acquaintance, when she wore pinafores and pigtails. Lord Haddon, I think I need not introduce again. You have met before."

The little flush deepened in Monica's face. She had fancied the face of the brother was not totally unfamiliar to her; but she did not remember until this moment where or when she could possibly have seen him.

"Oh, Haddon has been raving about Lady Monica ever since the auspicious day when he saw her," cried Beatrice, gaily. "I hope your father is quite recovered now?" she added, with a touch of quick sympathy, "since you were able to leave him so soon."

"I think he is much better, thank you,"

answered Monica, quietly; "but he was still very ill when I left him."

"And, Randolph, you have not explained away your guilt yet. Why have you been all this time without letting us see you or your wife? I call it shameful!"

"My wife has been very unwell herself ever since we came up," answered Randolph. "She has not been fit to see anybody."

"You should have made an exception in my favour," persisted Beatrice, bringing her horse alongside of Monica's, and walking on with her. "You see, I have known Randolph so long, he seems almost like a brother. I feel defrauded when he does not behave himself as such. We must be great friends, Lady Monica, for his sake. He has told us all about you and your

delightful Cornish home. I suppose you know all about us, too, and what near neighbours we are—near for London, at least."

But Monica had never heard the name of the girl beside her. She knew nothing of her husband's friends, never having taken the least interest in subjects foreign to all her past associations. She hinted something of the kind in a gently indifferent way, that was sincere, without being in the least discourteous. She was wondering why it was that her husband, who could value his own friends and appreciate their good-will, was so strenuously set against receiving the only acquaintance she possessed in this vast city.

Nevertheless, when, upon a forenoon two days later, at an hour she knew her husband was away, Conrad presented him-

self in her boudoir, following the man who had brought his card without waiting to be invited, Monica was conscious of a feeling of distinct displeasure and distrust. She knew very little of the ways of the world, but she felt that he had no right to be there, forcing himself upon her in her private room, when her husband would hardly speak to him or receive him, and that he merited instant dismissal.

But then came a revulsion of feeling. Was he not her childhood's friend? Had she not promised not to turn her back upon him, and help to drive him to despair by her coldness? Had he not come with news of Trevlyn and of home? And in that last eager thought all else was lost, and she met him gladly, almost eagerly.

He told her all she longed to know. He came primed with the latest news from Trevlyn. His manner was quiet and gentle. He was very cautious not to alarm or disturb her.

"I shall not be able to see much of you in the future, Monica," he said, "but you will let me call myself still your friend?"

She bent her head in a sort of assent.

"And will you let me take a friend's privilege, and ask one question. Are you happy in your new life?"

Monica's face took a strange expression.

"It is very gay, very lively. I shall like it better as I get more used to it."

"I see," he answered, very gently, "I understand. And when are you going home again?"

"I am at home now," she answered, steadily.

He looked searchingly at her.

"I thought Trevlyn was to be always home. Has he thrown off the mask so soon?"

"I think," said Monica, with a little gleam in her eye, "that you forget you are speaking of my husband."

Conrad's eyes gleamed too; but she did not see it.

"Forgive me, Monica; I did forget. It is all so strange and sudden. Then he makes you happy? Tell me that! Let me have the assurance that at least he makes his captive happy."

She started a little; but Conrad's face expressed nothing but the quietest, sincerest good-will and sympathy.

"He is very, very good to me," she said, quietly. "He studies me as I have never been studied before. All my wishes are forestalled: he thinks of everything, he does everything. I cannot tell you how good he is. I have never known anything like it before. Did you ever see anyone more surrounded by beauty and luxury than I am?"

He looked at her steadily. She knew that she had evaded his question—a question he had no right to put, as she could not but feel—and that he knew she had done so.

"Ah!" he murmured, "the gilded cage, the gilded cage; but only a cage, after all. Monica, forgive me for expressing a doubt; but I know the man so well, and my whole soul revolts at seeing you dragged as it

were at his chariot wheels for all the world to look at and admire. To take you from your wild free home, and bribe you into submission—I hate to think of it!"

Monica's cheek had flushed suddenly; but before she could frame a rejoinder the door opened to admit Randolph. He carried in his hand some hot-house flowers, which he had brought for his wife. He stopped short when he saw who was Monica's guest, and her cheek flamed anew, for she knew he would not understand how she came to receive him in her private room, and she felt that by a want of firmness and *savoir faire* she had allowed herself to be placed in a false position.

Conrad's exit was effected with more despatch than dignity, yet he contrived in his farewell words to insinuate that he had

passed a very happy morning with his hostess, instead of a brief ten minutes.

Randolph did not speak a word, but stood leaning against the chimney-piece with a stern look on his handsome face. Monica was angry with herself and with Conrad, yet she felt half indignant at the way her husband ignored her guest.

"Monica," said Randolph, speaking first, "I am sorry to have to say it; but I cannot receive Sir Conrad Fitzgerald as a guest beneath my roof."

"You had better give your orders, then, accordingly."

He stepped forward and took her hand.

"Surely, Monica, you cannot have any real liking for this man?"

"I do not know what you call real liking. We have been friends from child-

hood; and I do not easily change. He was always welcomed to my father's house."

"Your father did not know his history."

"Perhaps not; but I do. At least I know this much: that he has sinned and has repented. Is not repentance enough?"

"*Has* he repented?"

"Yes, indeed he has."

Randolph's face expressed a fine incredulity and scorn. There was no relenting in its lines. Monica was not going to sue longer.

"Am I also to be debarred from seeing Cecilia, his sister, who is married, and not living so very far away? Am I to give her up, too—my old playmate?"

"I have nothing against Mrs. Bellamy, except that she is his sister. I suppose you need not be very intimate?"

Monica's overwrought feelings vented themselves in a burst of indignation.

"I see what you want to do—to separate me from all my friends—to break all old ties—to make me forget all but your world, your life. I am to like your friends, to receive them, and be intimate with them; but I am to turn my back with scorn on all whom I have known and loved. You are very hard, Randolph, very hard. It is not that I care for Conrad—I know he has done wrong, though I do believe in his repentance. I liked him once, and Cecilia too; I should like to know them still. They are not much to me, but they belong to the old life—which you do not—which nothing does here. Can you not see how hard it is, and how unjust, to try and cut me off from everything?"

He looked at her with a great pity in his eyes, and then gently put the flowers into her hand.

"I brought them for you to wear to-night, Monica. Will you have them? Believe me, my child, I would do much to spare you pain, yet in some things I must be the judge. Some day, perhaps, I shall be able to make my meaning plain; meantime I must ask my wife to trust me." He stooped and kissed her pale brow, and went away without another word.

Monica stood still and silent, the fragrant, spotless blossoms, his gift, clasped close in her hands.

"Randolph, Randolph!" she murmured, "if you only loved me I could bear anything; but they all see it—only I am blind—it is the golden cage with its captive, and

they know the ways of their world so well, so well! He bribes me with gifts, with kind words, but it is only the peaceful home and the handsome wife that he wants—not me myself, not my heart, my love. Well, he shall have what he craves. I will not disappoint him. I will do his bidding in all things. He has got his prize—let that content him—but for the wifely love, the wifely trust I have striven so to offer—he does not care for them—let them go, like these." She pressed the flowers for a moment to her lips, and then flung them from the open casement.

Randolph, lost in silent thought, standing at a window below, saw the white blossoms as they fell to the earth, and knew what they were and whence they had come.

CHAPTER THE ELEVENTH.

THE LITTLE RIFT.

A LITTLE misunderstanding easily arises between two people not yet in perfect accord—so very soon arises, and is so difficult to lay to rest.

Randolph saw plainly now, that Monica's late gentleness had been caused simply by exhaustion and ill-health. She had submitted to his caressing care merely because she had been too weak to resist, but the first indication of restored health had been the effort to repel him. He was grieved and saddened by this conviction, but he accepted his fate with quiet patience. He would draw back a little, stand aside, as it were,

and let her feel her way in the new life ; and win her confidence, if he could, by slow and imperceptible degrees. He did not despair of winning her yet. He had had more than one of those rapturous moments when he had felt that she was *almost* his. He would not give up, but he would be more self-restrained and reserved. He would not attempt too much at once.

Monica was keenly conscious of the change in her husband's manner, though she could not understand why it was that it cut her so deeply. She was conscious of the great blank in her life, and though her face was always calm and quiet, her manner gently cold and tinged with sadness, yet she tried in all things to study her husband's wishes, and to follow out any hints he might let fall as to his tastes and feelings.

She made no effort to see anything of Cecilia Bellamy, her former child-friend, and even when that vivacious little woman sought her out, and tried to strike up a great friendship, she did not respond with any ardour. Mrs. Bellamy, indeed, was not at all a woman that Monica would be inclined to cultivate at this crisis of her life; they had almost nothing in common, but the past was a sort of link that could not entirely be broken. Cecilia appeared to love to talk of Trevlyn; she was always eager to hear the latest news from thence, to recall the by-gone days of childhood, and bring back the light and colour to Monica's face by reminiscences of the past.

But the young wife tried to be loyal to her husband's wishes, and was laughed at by her friend for her "old fashioned"

ways. Once, when in course of conversation, Conrad's name was mentioned between them, Monica asked, in her straightforward way, what it was that he had done to draw upon him censure and distrust.

"Why, do you not even know that much? Poor boy! I will tell you all about it. He was very young, and you know we are miserably poor. He got into bad company, and that led him into frightful embarrassments. He got so miserable and desperate at last that I believe his mind was almost unhinged for a time, and in the end," lowering her voice to a whisper, "he forged a cheque in the name of a rich friend. Of course it was a mad thing to do. He paid his debts, but the fraud was discovered within a few weeks, and you know what *might* have happened.

Colonel Hamilton, however, who had been a kind friend to Conrad before, forgave him, and took no steps against him; and the poor boy was so shocked and humiliated that he quite turned over a new leaf, and has been perfectly steady ever since. He was working hard to pay off the debt, but Colonel Hamilton died before he could do so. Randolph Trevlyn, your husband, my dear, was intimate with the Colonel, and knew all about this. He had always disliked Conrad — I suspect they were rivals once in the affections of some lady, and that he did not get the best of the rivalry — and I always believe it was through him that the story leaked out. At any rate, people did hear something, and poor Conrad got dreadfully cold-shouldered. He had always been wild and reckless, and

people are so fond of hitting a man when he is down. But I call it very unkind and unjust, and I did think that an old friend like you would be above it. It hurts Conrad dreadfully to find you so cold to him. I should have thought you would have liked to help him to recover the ground he had lost."

"That can hardly be my office now," said Monica, gravely.

"But at least you need not be unkind. I do assure you the poor boy has gone through quite enough, as it is."

"You have told me the whole truth about his past, Cecilia?" asked Monica, after a brief silence. "There is nothing worse you are keeping back?"

Mrs. Bellamy clasped her hands together with a little gesture of astonished dismay.

"Is not forgery bad enough for you,

Monica? What *has* your husband been telling you? Did you think he had committed a murder?"

Monica left Mrs. Bellamy's presence somewhat relieved in mind. She was glad to know the secret of Conrad's past, the cause of her husband's disdain and distrust of the man. It was natural, she thought, that Randolph, as a friend of Colonel Hamilton's, should feel deep indignation at the ingratitude and treachery of the fraud, and yet she felt a sort of relief that it was nothing blacker and baser. She had begun to have an undefined feeling, since she had entered somewhat into the tumultuous life of the great world, that there were depths of folly and sin and crime beneath its smooth, polished surface, of whose very existence she had never dreamed before.

When she returned home that day, and said from whose house she had just come, she fancied a shade gathered on her husband's brow. "Do you not go there rather often, Monica?"

"We were friends as children," she said. "Am I to give up everything that seems connected with the past—with my home?"

"I lay no embargo upon you, Monica," he said; "or at least only one: I cannot permit Sir Conrad Fitzgerald to visit my wife, nor enter my house. If his sister is your friend, and you wish to continue the friendship, I say nothing against it. You shall be the judge whether or not you visit at a house your husband cannot enter, and run the risk of meeting a man whose hand he can never touch. You shall do exactly

as you wish in the matter. I leave you entire liberty."

A flush rose slowly in Monica's face.

"I want to do what is right to every one," she said. "You put things very hardly, Randolph. You only see one side, and even that you view very harshly. I have heard Conrad's story; it is very painful and shameful; but he has repented—he has indeed, and done all he could to make amends. I have been taught that repentance makes atonement, even in God's sight. I cannot sit in judgment then, and condemn him utterly."

Randolph looked at her keenly.

"Do you know all?"

"Yes," she answered steadily, "I know all. It is very bad; but he has repented."

"I have seen no signs of repentance."

"Have you ever given yourself the chance to do so?"

He was still gazing earnestly at her.

"Monica," he said, very gravely, "be advised by me. Do not make yourself Fitzgerald's champion."

"I do not intend," she answered, coldly, "but neither will I be his judge."

There was silence for a moment, then Randolph spoke.

"We will discuss this question no further. It is a painful one for me. I can never meet that man in friendship; I could wish that you could be content to forget him too; but he is an old friend. You are not connected with the dark passages in his life, and if his repentance is sincere I will not forbid your meeting him or speaking to him, if you find yourself in

his company. It goes against me, I confess, Monica. But I do not feel I have the right to say more. If you are acquainted with the story of his life, you are able to form your own estimate of his deserts."

The subject ended there, but it left a sort of sore constraint in the minds of both. It was almost with a feeling of relief a few mornings later that Randolph opened a letter from the bailiff of his Scotch estate, requesting the presence of the master for a few days. The young man had been getting his shooting-box renovated and beautified for the reception of his young wife, hoping to prevail upon her in the autumn to come north with him, and his own presence on the spot had become a matter of necessity.

Monica heard of his proposed absence with perfect quietness, which, however, hid

a good deal of sinking at heart. She did not venture to ask to accompany him, nor did she suggest, as he had half feared, returning to Trevlyn. She assented quietly to the proposition, and gave no outward sign of dismay.

Randolph sighed as he noted her indifference. Once she would have dreaded being left alone in the strange world of London, have begged him not to leave her, but now she was quite happy to see him depart. He was gradually growing sorrowfully convinced that his marriage had been a great mistake, and that Monica's love would never be his. There had been sweet moments both before and after marriage, but they were few and far between, and the hope he had once so ardently cherished was growing fainter every day.

However, life must go on in its accustomed groove, and the night before his departure was spent with Beatrice and her brother, who were giving a select dinner party. Randolph and Monica seldom spent an evening at home alone now.

Beatrice Wentworth's little parties were very popular. She was an excellent hostess, her endless sparkle and flow of spirit kept her guests well amused, and she treated her numerous admirers with a provoking friendliness and equality that was diverting to witness. Lord Haddon was a favourite, too, from his good-natured simplicity and frankness; and there was an easy unconstrained atmosphere about their house that made it a pleasant place of resort to its *habitués*.

Monica had grown fond of Beatrice, in

her quiet, undemonstrative fashion, and felt more at home in her house than in any other. Sometimes when those two were alone together Beatrice would lay aside that brilliant sparkle and flow of spirit, and lapse into a sudden gravity and seriousness that would have astonished many of her friends and acquaintances had they chanced to witness it. Sometimes Monica fancied at such moments that some kind of cloud rested upon the handsome, dashing girl, that her past held some tear-stained page, some sad or painful memory; and it was this conviction that had won Monica's confidence and friendship more than anything else. She could not make a true friend of any one who had never known sorrow.

To-night Monica was unusually *distraite*, sad and heavy at heart, she hardly knew

why; finding it unusually difficult to talk or smile, or to hide from the eyes of others the melancholy that oppressed her. She felt a strange craving for her husband's presence. She wanted him near her. She longed to return to those first days of married life, when his compassion for her made him so tender, when he was always with her, and she believed that he loved her. Sometimes she had been almost happy then, despite the wrench from the old associations and the strangeness of all around. Now she was always sad and heavy-hearted; and to-night she was curiously oppressed.

It was only at this house that she could ever be persuaded to sing, and to-night it was not till the end of the evening that Lord Haddon's entreaties prevailed with

her. She rose at last and crossed to the piano, and sitting down without any music before her, sang a simple melodious setting to some words of Christina Rossetti's :—

"When I am dead, my dearest,
Sing no sad songs for me ;
Plant thou no roses at my head,
Nor shady cypress-tree.
Be the green grass above me,
With showers and dew-drops wet ;
And if thou wilt, remember—
And if thou wilt, forget.

"I shall not see the shadows,
I shall not feel the rain ;
I shall not hear the nightingale,
Sing on as if in pain.
But dreaming through the twilight,
Which doth not rise nor set,
I haply may remember—
And haply may forget."

As she sang, the room, the company, all faded from her view and from her mind—all but Randolph. One strange longing filled her soul—the longing that she might

indeed lie sleeping and at rest in some quiet, winds-wept spot, her spirit hovering free—to see if her husband ever came to stand beside that grave, to see if he would in such a case remember—or forget.

For herself Monica, knew well that remembrance would be her portion. She never could forget.

There was a wonderful sweetness and pathos in her voice as she sang. The listeners held their breath, and sudden tears started to Beatrice's eyes. When the last note had died away, Randolph crossed the room and laid his hand upon his wife's shoulder. There was a subdued murmur all through the room, but she only heard her husband's voice.

"That was very sweet, Monica," he said gently. "I have never heard it before ;

but you make it sound so unutterably sad."

She looked up at him wistfully.

"I think sad songs are always sweetest—they are more like life, at least."

His eyes were very full of tenderness; she saw it, and it almost unmanned her.

"I am so tired, Randolph; will you take me home? The carriage will not be here, but it is such a little way. I should like best to walk."

A very few moments later they were out in the warm, spring air, under the twinkling stars. She held his arm closely. Her hand trembled a little, he fancied. He drew her light lace wrap more closely round her, thinking she felt chilled. At this little mark of thoughtfulness she looked up at him with a tremulous smile.

"I shall miss you when you are gone, Randolph," she said, softly. "You will not be long away?"

His heart beat high, but his words were very quietly spoken.

"No Monica, only four or five days."

"And you will take care of yourself? You will come back safe—you will not get into any danger!"

"Why no," he answered with a smile. "Danger! What are you thinking about, Monica?"

"I don't know. Sometimes my heart is very heavy. It is heavy to-night. Promise you will take care of yourself—for my sake."

Randolph did not, after all, go away quite comfortless.

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